First in Fiction

Everybody's
MAGAZINE

MAR 14 1922

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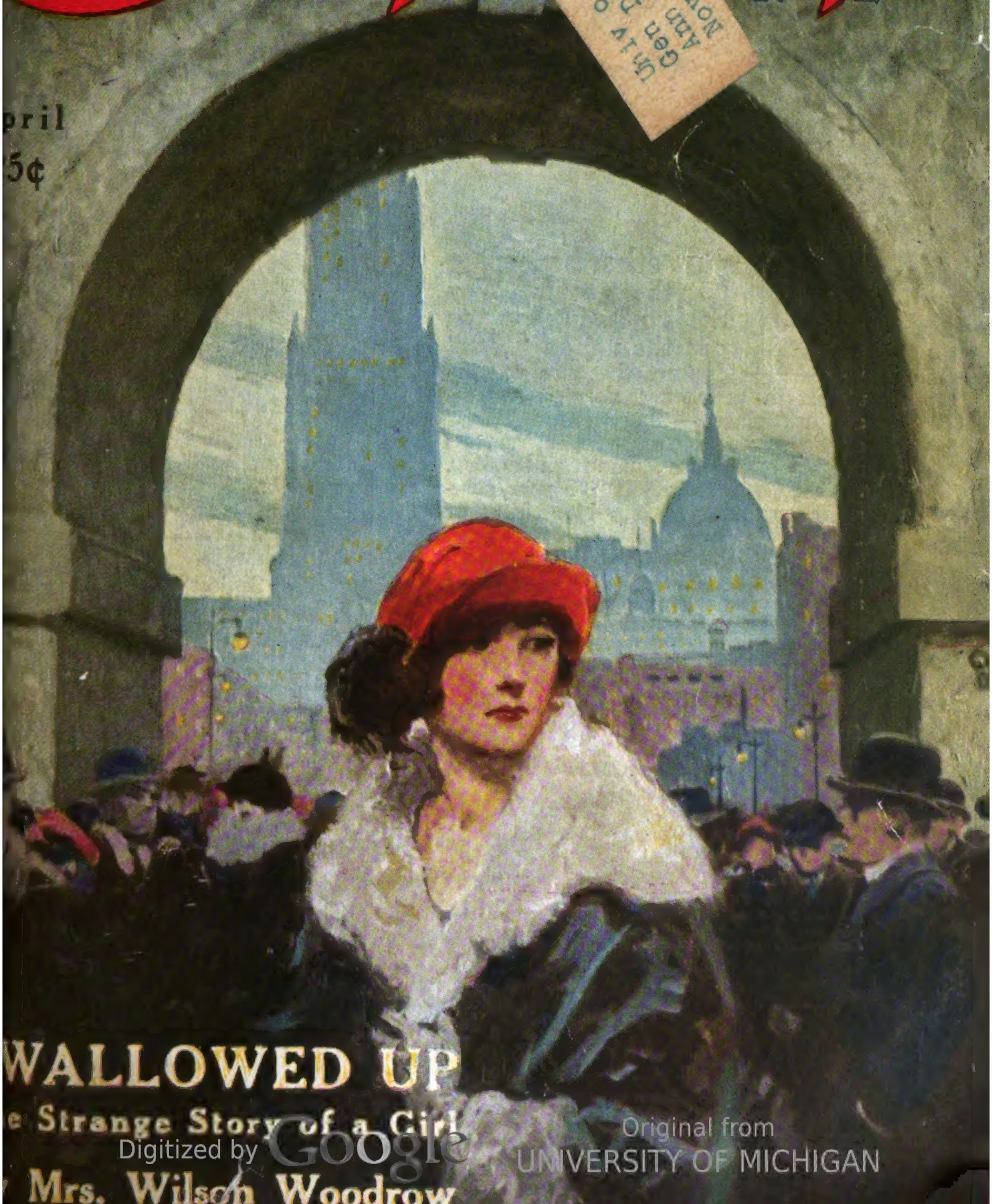
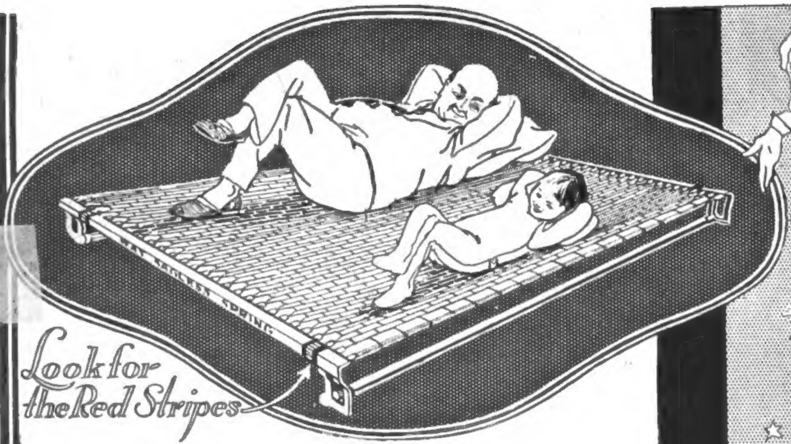
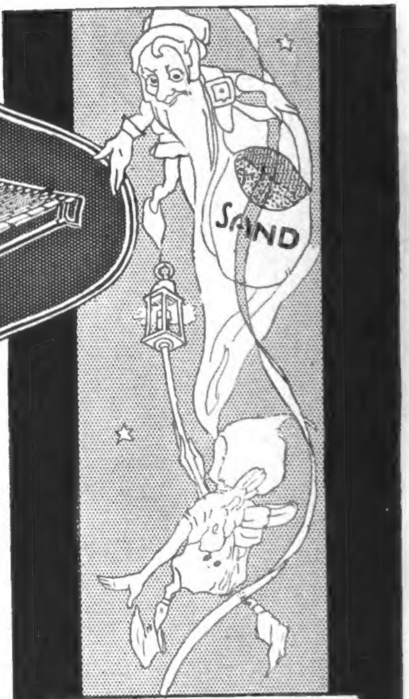


WALLOWED UP
e Strange Story of a Girl
y Mrs. Wilson Woodrow



Look for the Red Stripes



IN no other bedspring but the genuine Way Sagless Spring can you get the unique "Way" features that give you the utmost in permanent sleeping comfort and restfulness—the patented "Way" elastic hollow cable construction, the truss support that keeps frame from bending, the stiff cable edges—the 25 year guarantee against sagging, stretching or breaking.

How important it is, therefore, that you get the *genuine.* You can be sure by looking for the red stripes and the name on the frame.

If you don't know a "Way" dealer near you, *phone the Tell-U-Where Information Bureaus* (if you live in a large city) or look for the store with the Way Sagless Spring sign or window display.

"The Restful Way" tells the whole story. Write for a copy.

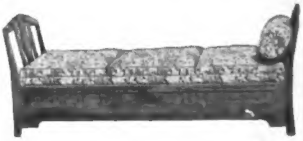
Way Sagless Spring Co., Minneapolis, Minn.

Branch Factories in Chicago and Cleveland. Distributing warehouses at Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Detroit, St. Louis

Made and sold in North Atlantic States by
Burton-Dixie Corporation, N. Y.

In Canada by Parkhill Bedding Limited, Winnipeg: Canadian Mersereau Co., Ltd., Toronto.

Southern Distributors: Belknap Hdwe. & Mfg., Co., Inc.. Louisville, Ky., Chittenden & Eastman Company, Burlington, Iowa, Peck & Hills Furniture Co., Denver, San Francisco Los Angeles



Way Sagless Daybeds

—are winning favor everywhere. Opens out into a full size bed—but you'd never know it to look at one when closed. Equipped with Way Sagless Spring and has new improved features you'll like. Period designs, walnut and mahogany finish, upholstered in beautiful tapestries, denims and cretonnes. Made in davenport styles also. Write for portfolio of designs.

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"NO sag in any WAY"

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Geo Kohaw $200 00/100
Two hundred Dollars
Weekly Pay Voucher
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(Treasurer)

An Amazingly Easy Way to Earn $10,000 a Year

Let Me Show You How FREE

TO the average man the $10,000-a-year job is only a dream. Yet today there are a surprising number of men earning five-figure salaries who were merely dreaming of them a short while ago. The secret of their success should prove a startling revelation to every ambitious man who has ever aspired to get into the $10,000-a-year class.

There is nothing "different" about the man whose salary runs into five figures. He is made of the same stuff as you and I. For example, take J. P. Overstreet, of Dallas, Texas. A few short years ago he was a police officer earning less than $1,000 a year. Today his earnings are in excess of $1,000 a month—more than $12,000 a year. C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa., was formerly a railroad employe on a small salary—last month his earnings were $1,562.

Read These Amazing Stories of Success

Earned $524 in Two Weeks
I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $306 and this week $218. You have done wonders for me.—Geo. W. Kearns, 107 W. Park Place, Oklahoma City, Okla.

I Now Earn as High as $100 a Day
I took your course two years ago. Was earning $15 a week clerking. Am now selling many of the largest firms in the U. S. I have earned more than $100 in a day. You secured me my position. Our Sales Manager is a graduate of yours.—J. L. De Bonis, 4615 Warwick Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Earns $1,562 in Thirty Days
My earnings for the past thirty days are $1,562.00, and I won Second Prize in March, although I only worked two weeks during that month.—C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa.

Earned $1,800 in Six Weeks
My earnings for March were over $1,000 and over $1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were $356.00. I travel eleven months out of the year, working 5 days each week. The N. S. T. A. dug me out of a rut where I was earning less than $1,000 a year and showed me how to make a success.—J. P. Overstreet, Denison, Texas.

Why Don't YOU Get Into The Selling Field?

Mr. Overstreet, Mr. Campbell, and the others whose letters you see on this page are all successful salesmen. They have stepped into the $10,000-a-year class—and they never sold goods before! It is hard to believe that such big success could come so quickly and easily. Yet it was all amazingly simple! Ask them the secret of their sudden success. They will tell you they owe it to the National Salesmen's Training Association. This is an organization of top-notch salesmen and sales managers, formed expressly for the purpose of training men to sell and helping them to good selling positions. It has taken hundreds of men from all walks of life and made them Master Salesmen—it has lifted them out of the rut and shown them the way to magnificent earnings, to fascinating careers and big selling positions.

We Train You And Help You Land A Job

What these men have done, you can do! In your spare time at home you can easily master the secrets of selling that make Star Salesmen. Whatever your experience has been—whatever you may be doing now—whether or not you think you can sell—just answer this question: Are you ambitious to earn $10,000 a year? Then send me your name quick! I will prove to you without cost or obligation that you can easily become a Star Salesman. I will show you how the Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service of the N. S. T. A. will help you to wonderful success in Selling.

Free Book on Salesmanship

Just mail the coupon or write for our great illustrated Book, "A Knight of the Grip," which we will send you Free. Let us prove to you that regardless of what you are doing now you can quickly become a Star Salesman. Let us show you how you, too, can step into the ranks of the big money makers of business. See how easily you can learn this fascinating, big-pay profession at home in your spare time. Learn what we have done for others and what we stand ready to do for you. Don't put it off until tomorrow—write us today. Mail the coupon at once.

National Salesmens Training Association
Dept. 74-D, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

National Salesmens Training Association
Dept. 74-D, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me, without any obligation on my part, your free book "A Knight of the Grip" and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service. Also a list showing lines of business with openings for salesmen.

Name ....

Street ....

City ....State ....

EVERYBODY'S
April 1922

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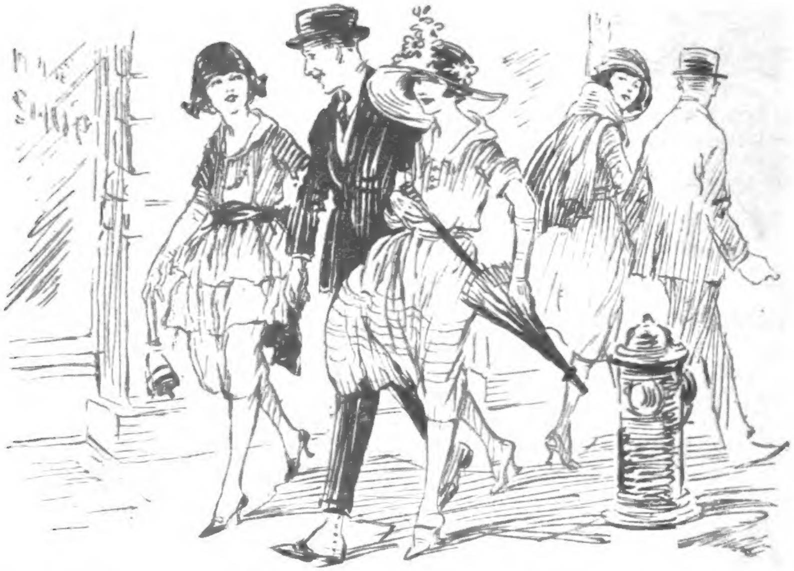

What's Wrong in this Picture?

It's so easy to make embarrassing mistakes in public—so easy to commit blunders that make people misjudge you. Can you find the mistake or mistakes that are being made in this picture? Can you point out what is wrong? If you are not sure, read the interesting article below, and perhaps you will be able to find out.

IT is a mark of extreme good breeding and culture to be able to do at all times exactly what is correct. This is especially true in public where strangers judge us by what we do and say. The existence of fixed rules of etiquette makes it easy for people to know whether we are making mistakes or whether we are doing the thing that is absolutely correct and cultured. They are quick to judge—and quick to condemn. It depends entirely upon our knowledge of the important little rules of etiquette whether they respect and admire us, or receive an entirely wrong and prejudiced impression.

In public, many little questions of good conduct arise. By public, we mean at the theatre, in the street, on the train, in the restaurant and hotel—wherever men and women who are strangers mingle together and judge one another by action and speech. It is not enough to *know* that one is well-bred. One must see that the strangers one meets every day get no impression to the contrary.

Do you know the little rules of good conduct that divide the cultured from the uncultured, that serve as a barrier to keep the ill-bred out of the circles where they would be awkward and embarrassed? Do you know the important rules of etiquette that men of good society must observe, that women of good society are expected to follow rigidly? Perhaps the following questions will help you find out just how much you know about etiquette:

Etiquette at the Theatre

When a man and woman walk down the theatre aisle together, should the man precede the woman? May they walk arm-in-arm? When the usher indicates their places, should the woman enter first or the man?

Many puzzling questions of conduct confront the members of a theatre party who occupy a box. Which seats should the women take and which the men? Should the women remove their hats—or don't they wear any? What should women wear to the theatre in the evening? What should men wear? Is it correct for a man to leave a woman alone during intermission?

At the theatre, evidences of good conduct can be more strikingly portrayed than perhaps anywhere else. Here, with people surrounding us on all sides, we are admired as being cultured, well-poised and attractive, or we are looked upon as coarse and ill-bred. It depends entirely upon how well one knows and follows the rules of etiquette.

At the Dance

How should the man ask a woman to dance? What should he say to her when the music ceases nd he must return to his original partner? Do ou know the correct dancing positions?

How should a woman accept a dance and how hould she refuse it? How can the embarrassment of being a wall-flower be avoided? How many times may a girl dance with the same partner without breaking the rules of etiquette? Is considered correct, in social circles, for a young woman to wander away from the ball-room with er partner?

Very often introductions must be made in the all-room. Should a man be introduced to a woman, or a woman to a man? Is it correct to say, *Miss Brown, meet Mr. Smith*, or *Mr. Smith, meet Miss Brown?* Which of these two forms is correct: *Bobby, this is Mrs. Smith*, or *Mrs. Smith, this is Bobby?* When introducing a married woman and single woman should you say, *Mrs. Brown, allow me to present Miss Smith*, or *Miss Smith, allow me o present Mrs. Brown?*

When leaving the ball-room, is the guest expected o thank the hostess? What should the woman uest say when she leaves? What hould the gentleman guest say? t is only by knowing exactly what is correct, that one can avoid the embarrassment and humiliation of social blunders, and win the respect and admiration of those whom one comes in conact with.

Do You Know—

- ***how*** to introduee men and women correctly?
- ***how*** to answer a dinner invitation?
- ***how*** to greet a man or woman acquuintance in public?
- ***how*** to plan church and house weddings?
- ***how*** to use table silver properly?
- ***how*** to word invitations and acknowledgments?
- ***how*** to avoid blunders at the theatre and opera?
- ***how*** to do at all times the thing that is absolutely correct and cultured?

In the Street

There are countless tests of good manners that distinguish the well-bred in public. For instance, the man must know exactly what is correct when he is walking with a young woman. According to etiquette, is it ever permissible for a man to take a woman's arm? May a woman take a gentleman's arm? When walking with two women, should a man take his place between them or on the outside?

When is it permissible for a man to pay a woman's fare on the street-car or railroad? Who enters the car first, the woman or the man? Who leaves the car first?

If a man and woman who have met only once before encounter each other in the street, who should make the first sign of recognition? Is the woman expected to smile and nod before the gentleman raises his hat? On what occasions should the hat be raised?

People of culture can be recognized at once. They know exactly what to do and say on every occasion, and because they know that they are doing absolutely what is correct, they are calm, well-poised, dignified. They are able to mingle with the most highly-cultivated people, in the highest social circles, and yet be entirely at ease.

The Book of Etiquette

There have probably been times when you suffered embarrassment because you did not know exactly what to do or say. There have probably been times when you wished you had some definite information regarding certain problems of conduct, when you wondered how you could have avoided a certain blunder.

The Book of Etiquette is recognized as one of the most dependable and reliable authorities on the conduct of good society. It has solved the problems of thousands of men and women. It has shown them how to be well-poised and at ease even among the most brilliant celebrities. It has shown them how to meet embarrassing moments with a calm dignity. It has made it possible for them to do and say and write and wear at all times only what is entirely correct.

In the Book of Etiquette, now published in two large volumes, you will find chapters on dinner etiquette and dance etiquette, chapters on the etiquette of engagements and weddings, chapters on teas and parties and entertainments of all kinds. You will find authoritative information regarding the wording of invitations, visiting cards and all social correspondence. The subject of introductions is covered exhaustively, and the etiquette of travel devolves into an interesting discussion of correct form in France, England and other foreign countries. From cover to cover, each book is filled with interesting and extremely valuable information.

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Let us send you the famous Book of Etiquette free so that you can read and examine it in your own home. You are not obligated to buy if you do not want to. Just examine the books carefully, read a page here and there, glance at the illustrations, let it solve some of the puzzling questions of conduct that you have been wondering about. Within the 5 days, decide for yourself whether or not you want to return it.

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Mail the coupon for your set of the Book of Etiquette to-day. Surprise your friends with your wide knowledge of the correct thing to do, say, write and wear at all times. Remember, it costs you nothing to see and examine the books. Mail the coupon NOW. Nelson Doubleday, Inc., Dept. 1084, Oyster Bay, N. Y.

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Without obligation on my part, and without any money in advance, you may send me the complete two-volume set of the Book of Etiquette for free examination. Within 5 days after receipt I will either return the books or keep them and send you only $3.50 in full payment.

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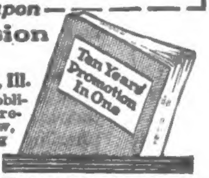
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Experience Not Necessary

To **start** is the thing! Haywood's easy **Tire Surgery** method and Haywood's "One Man" machine will do the rest. Will make money for you—lots of it—from very beginning. Charlie **Evans** of Indiana, carpenter, past middle age, **knew nothing** of tires less than year ago. He bought a Haywood machine. Learned **Tire Surgery.** Now is earning more than $100 week.

Opportunity Never Better

Seven million car owners in country. Most of them **must** economize. Can't buy new tires. Must make old tires do. They can tinker with their auto, but can't mend tires. This work will swamp present Tire Surgery stations. Many more needed in every section of United States.

I Can Place 500 Men in Good Locations Right Now!

It's a proposition **you** can handle. Cash in on this great **economic wave** that is sweeping old tires into repair shops instead of junk piles. Etzrodt of Pennsylvania averages $30,000 in this business. Blair of Ohio does more than $100 daily with small **Tire Surgery** shop. Oldham of Illinois reports recent earnings of $2200 in four months. And so on. These men **acted.** They had no experience. Possessed very little capital. Enjoyed no advantages you haven't got.

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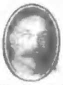

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When the Rattlesnake Struck

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Yours respectfully,
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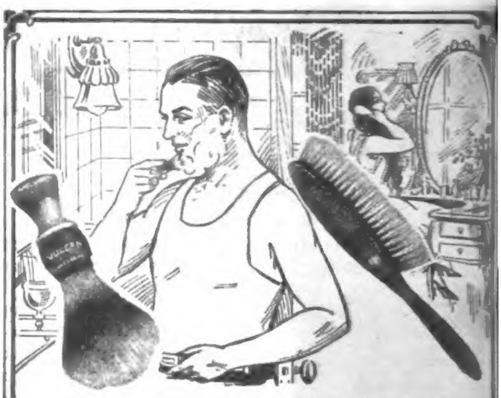

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NUMBER FOUR APRIL, 1922 VOLUME XLVI

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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A joyful reminder of O. Henry

Then there'll be additional instalments of two serials—"Godless Valley" and "Swallowed Up"—and the opening of a new serial.

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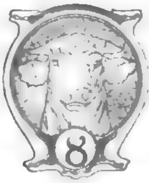
NUMBER FOUR APRIL, 1922 VOLUME XLVI



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Reporters and amateur investigators followed the trail from the Ranger house to the sweets shop. There they stopped, unable to go further.

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HOPE RANGER walked down the hall to her mother's sitting-room. The moment she had passed inside and closed the door behind her, a man servant stepped out of the automatic lift a little farther along the corridor and followed her noiselessly. He had some letters on a tray, but it apparently was not his intention to deliver them at once. Instead, he paused close to the sitting-room door, his head inclined, listening.

As Hope entered, her mother looked up with a smile from some notes she was writing.

"Going out, darling?" she asked.

"No, dear heart; I'm going to spend a long, lazy afternoon shoveling coal in the cellar." Hope laughed at the superfluous question. She so manifestly was going out. Not for house wear were the tailored suit, the smart small hat on her dark hair.

"I'm to meet Lucia at the Plaza," she explained, dropping her bantering tone. "Her mother will be there with some people, but we sha'n't bother with them. After luncheon they are going on to a matinée—that is, Lucia and her mother are—but it's 'Philander,' and I've seen it three times, you know, so I begged off. I'll pick up some veils and a few things I need, and then home."

The man outside had his ear against the door now, unwilling to miss a word of the conversation; but at the same time his eyes were watching alertly along the hall and down the staircase.

"I don't know, though," Hope reconsidered, "but that I'd better drop into Silcott's and hurry him up with those fittings. If by any miracle he is ready, I could telephone you to come down. Or, better still, come to luncheon with us, and then go there with me. Do, mother!"

The eavesdropper's mouth twisted downward as Mrs. Ranger hesitated; but his ugly expression cleared as he caught her answer.

"No-o; I'll not tag. You and Lucia will enjoy yourselves more alone. Besides, I've no end of things to look after. Are you driving down, dear?"

Again the man at the door held his breath, waiting for Hope's reply.

"I need the walk," she shrugged lightly. "My skin is crying for air and exercise." She scrutinized her reflection in a dim mirror with a quaint, tarnished gilt frame.

Everything in this intimate room of Mrs. Ranger's was old and faintly tarnished. In her day she had been a beauty, Southern as her name, Mary Louise Beauchamp Carter—poor as poverty with generations of wealth behind her—born to a leaking family rooftree, old family silver, old family pictures, old family servants, the latter dwindling in number until none remained.

Her mother had pinned her last hope to Mary Lou; but before the rash girl was twenty she had lost her head over a rising young nobody-at-all, Loring Ranger, with less background than a chipmunk and no particularly substantial foreground, and had recklessly married him. Mrs. Carter shed tears steadily, and only abandoned them for equally steady smiles when she realized the genius of her son-in-law for making money hand over hand—lucky hands that turned everything they touched into gold. Then, completely reconciled, she gave them her blessing, bestowed upon them the family heirlooms and departed this life in peace.

HOPE, so far as a physical presentment goes, was a replica of what her mother had been at her age. The difference lay in point of view. Mary Lou was a product of the Age of Innocence; Hope was twentieth century to her finger-tips, sure of herself, confident of her ability to meet any situation, with a knowledge of the world and of the facts of life which amazed and occasionally shocked her mother.

She turned now from the inspection of herself in the glass.

"So you don't care for my society to-day; some intrigue on hand?" She was rewarded with the reproachful glance she expected. "Well, amuse yourself your own way."

Mischievously she ruffled her mother's sleek head, cuffing her affectionately first on one ear and then on the other, and, bending down, kissed her cheek.

"Good-by."

"Oh, wait a moment!" Mrs. Ranger caught her hand. "I forgot to tell you your father won't be home this evening. He's having some out-of-town men at the club. Why shouldn't you and I do a play?"

"No reason on earth." Hope nodded. "Choose something neither of us has seen. A slushy, weepy one—the kind you like."

She had reached the door when her mother stopped her again.

"You'll telephone from Silcott's, you say, if he's ready for your fittings? That will be about three o'clock, I suppose?"

"Or even earlier."

Her hand was on the knob now, but once more her mother detained her.

"Wait!" Mrs. Ranger cried, with a wistful reluctance to see her go, she didn't know just why. "No"—shaking her head—"there was something I wanted to say, but it's slipped my mind. Run along."

"You want to make me late—that's all." Hope made a funny little face at her from the doorway.

The man servant was at the head of the stairs with his tray of letters as she came out.

"Anything for me, Fitch?"

"No, Miss Ranger; they're all for Mrs. Ranger."

Hope ran down the stairs. A moment later she was walking through the cross-street on which she lived, and at the corner she turned down Fifth Avenue.

A delectable morning. There was just enough crispness in the air to quicken the blood. The trees beyond the gray wall of the park were a mist of green; light clouds jostled each other in the blue spaces of the sky and hurried on toward the sea; window-boxes were bright with tulips and hyacinths, their delicate fragrance mingling with the smell of gasoline, which always lies over this one of the world's great thoroughfares. Shining motors were spinning along. People stepped out briskly, while the sun overlaid with its gilt patina the whole vivacious scene.

The face of more than one passer-by brightened at the sight of Hope. She was so in accord with the morning. She gave so convincingly the impression that she had not an ungratified wish—that there were no moons for which she was secretly crying—that they, too, for one brief optimistic moment, felt that life was good and life was gay.

She walked on down the avenue, and, crossing over at Fifty-ninth Street, arrived at the Plaza just as her friend, Lucia Thorne, and the latter's mother alighted from a limousine which had drawn up before the entrance.

There was an exchange of greetings and, a moment or two of laughing chatter on the sidewalk; then the three passed together into the hotel.

Meanwhile, the man who had been listening at the keyhole stole furtively out of the house by an area door and made his way to a telephone station in the back of a near-by cigar store.

A WESTERN manufacturer, one of Loring Ranger's two guests at dinner that evening, was just reaching the point of a story which had been interrupted by frequent bursts of laughter when a hall-boy approached the table and informed Mr. Ranger that he was wanted on the telephone. Ranger laid down his cigar.

"One moment," he said, rising. "And, Arnold, hold your breath and don't finish that story until I come back. If you do, you'll have to go all over it again."

He made his way through the dining-room, a big, good-looking, dominant man, and into a telephone-booth.

"Loring?" His wife's voice came quaveringly over the wire. "Oh, I am so glad to get you! I'm terribly worried. Hope went out this morning and hasn't come back yet. And it is nine o'clock."

"Where did she go?" he asked.

"To have luncheon with Lucia Thorne. Then she expected to do an errand or two and come home."

Ranger laughed easily.

"She's gone on some party with Lucia. Probably she telephoned, and they've neglected to give you the message."

"No." Mrs. Ranger's tone was positive. "I've questioned all of the servants. Then I called up the Thornes. Mrs. Thorne says that Hope left them a few minutes after two, telling them just what she told me, about attending to her errands and then coming home. She and I were going to a play this evening."

"Now, now, Mary Lou," he said soothingly, "there's no reason to get excited. You know as well as I do that Hope's perfectly able to look out for herself—no one better. She's having a good time somewhere and doesn't realize how late it's getting. That's all there is to it."

But he was frowning as he uttered the reassuring words; the incident disturbed him more than he cared to have his wife know.

"You're all in," he said, pretending to be concerned only on her account; "so I'm coming home at once. If she isn't there before I am, I'll trace her for you in no time. Just keep cool and don't fret; it'll be all right."

He glanced at his watch as he hung up the receiver. Twenty minutes after nine. Again his brow contracted; it was unlike Hope to be so inconsiderate, knowing her mother's inclination to worry.

The Rangers, it will be seen, were not ultramodern. New York, in spite of its chroniclers, is not all jazz and home brew. There are families of quite good social position, even since the war, where the unexplained absence of a daughter after reasonable hours gives rise to question.

But Mr. Ranger, although disquieted, was not particularly alarmed. Girls, even the best of them, are apt to be thoughtless, and Hope was certain to show up before long with some plausible explanation.

Still, he lost no time in excusing himself to his guests, and, hurrying out to a taxi, told the chauffeur to take him home, and "step on it."

On the way he succeeded so well in convincing himself that Hope was either already returned or had been heard from that, when he entered the house, he was quite prepared to tease his wife over her tempest in a teapot. But the jocular sentence died on his lips as she met him in the hall, white-faced.

"No word yet?" he asked, and, as she mutely shook her head, put his arm about her shoulders and drew her into the library.

"Sit down," he said, "and tell me all you know."

Making a brave effort to control her agitation, Mrs. Ranger recounted as faithfully as she could the conversation between Hope and herself that morning and the program the girl had outlined for her movements. She had not really become anxious, she said, until about six o'clock, knowing that Mrs. Thorne and Lucia might easily have persuaded Hope to accompany them to the matinée; and even later she kept trying to tell herself that Hope might also have decided to dine with the Thornes, although, in that case, it seemed strange that she had not telephoned her intentions.

But when it neared the theatre-hour she had grown panicky and had called up first the Thornes and then all of Hope's more intimate friends, both men and girls, whom she was able to reach, but without the slightest result. She had also telephoned the tailor, getting him after some difficulty at his home, but he insisted that Miss Ranger had not been at his establishment that afternoon.

Ranger, who had listened intently to her report, gave a puzzled shake of the head and, stepping into the hall, spoke to the butler.

"I've sent for Higby," he said, returning. "He'll probably laugh at us as a couple of fools. But I don't care. We need the cool advice of an outsider."

Eustace Higby was Ranger's attorney and a warm friend of the family, with an apartment only half a block away.

WHILE they waited for him, Ranger occupied himself in constructing different theories to account for Hope's absence and failure to communicate, his favorite one being that she had been persuaded to motor into the country with a party of friends, and that they had found themselves stalled in some remote spot.

"The trouble is, we've given her too free a hand, Mary Lou," he grumbled. "Ah"—starting up as he heard the hall door close—"there she is now!"

But it was Higby, the lawyer, not Hope, who, in response to the butler's direction, turned into the library.

"Time and a half for overtime, Ranger," he warned banteringly. "What's the idea of—" He broke off as he saw their drawn faces and took a quick step forward. "Something wrong?" he asked sharply.

But as the explanation proceeded, the lines about his eyes began to crinkle, and at the finish, as Ranger had predicted, he gave a mirthful chuckle.

"You two ridiculous old hens with your lone duckling!" He regarded them with mock compassion. "Hope isn't a baby. She knows her New York like a book, and is quite as sophisticated as all girls are nowadays. You've given her everything in the world but one thing"—he flung up his arm in an open-handed gesture—"adventure. Naturally she wants a touch of it, so she's gone on some little harmless spree of her own."

"No! No!" cried Mrs. Ranger impatiently. "You know Hope too well really to believe anything of that sort, Eustace. The most devoted, the most considerate of girls. There's every reason to be seriously alarmed. Oh"—her voice broke suddenly, and she wrung her hands—"won't you two men do something? I want something done!"

"That's right," assented Ranger strongly. "I don't propose to sit around here any longer, trying to argue with myself that things are all right. Every day people older and more sophisticated than Hope are being knocked down by automobiles, or"—he glanced at his wife, and added lamely—"or having something happen to them."

Higby shook his head.

"I'm satisfied you two are making a mountain out of a very insignificant molehill," he insisted optimistically. "Still, to relieve all of our minds, I'll make sure."

He busied himself at the telephone, his investigations lasting some time, owing to the extreme care he took to avoid any opportunity for publicity; but in the end he was able to announce that no young woman answering the description of Hope Ranger had been reported at any of the hospitals or station-houses of the city as the victim of an accident or sudden illness.

But this assurance rather added to than relieved the perplexities of the situation. Ranger, nervously pacing the floor, expressed the general feeling.

"By George, I almost wish it had been the other way round. Then, at least, we would know where she is."

Higby glanced at the clock. It was on the stroke of twelve.

"I still believe," he said dryly, "that you will receive a message from Hope to-night—or, at any rate, by to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?" Mrs. Ranger echoed, with a tremulous gasp.

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"Ranger"—his tone was direct, incisive—"there's no use in beating about the bush this way. If you want me to help you, we must have absolute frankness."

Husband and wife stared at him.

"What do you mean?" growled Ranger.

"Simply this: You and I have been not only lawyer and client but friends and neighbors as well. Still, no matter how close an intimacy may be, there are always undercurrents in the life of every family which remain unknown to an outsider. What I want you to tell me, both of you, is the real reason why Hope left home."

"Why Hope left home?" repeated Ranger.

"Left home!" cried Mrs. Ranger, starting up. "*Left* home! How crazy of you, Eustace Higby! How perfectly crazy!"

"Is it?" he retorted, unshaken. "Since there has been no accident, and since it is absurd, unbelievable that a girl of her age and knowledge of the world could have been abducted or enticed away, it follows that she must have gone of her own accord. But what was her motive in doing so? Is there some love-affair back of this?"

Ranger started to speak, and then glanced doubtfully at his wife. But she shook her head violently.

"No," she insisted. "Hope has had flirtations, of course—lots of them; she is popular. She plays about with the boys in her set, and some older men. Once or twice she has seemed on the verge of taking one of them seriously, but it came to nothing. I know that positively. I am her confidante in everything. We are more like two sisters than mother and daughter."

"There was no man to whom you objected?"

"Absolutely not." Ranger's denial was emphatic. "I see what you are driving at, Higby, but you are on the wrong tack."

"Well then, was there any other cause for disagreement? Did she, for instance, have ambitions for a so-called career—want to live her own life—or go on the stage——"

"No! No!" protested the mother wildly. "Oh, why do you waste time in this silly questioning? Hope never went away of her own free will, I don't care what you say. Something has happened to her. Even now she may be suffering—dying! Oh, is there nothing you men can do but talk and ask questions? I want my little girl! I want my baby!"

Her husband put his arms about her.

"We'll find her," he said through his clenched teeth. "We'll find her. Don't believe anything else, Mary Lou. What's my money good for, if it can't do that?"

The lawyer sat thinking, pulling at his chin. Then he got up with an air of decision and reached for his hat.

"I'm going down to talk to Lucia Thorne," he said. "She was the last person we know of that Hope saw, and her most intimate friend, wasn't she? Well"—in answer to Mrs. Ranger's eager nod—"that young woman is in for the stiffest kind of a cross-examination. If she knows anything she isn't telling, trust me to frighten it out of her before I get through. If she's a blank"—he paused and pursed up his lips—"then I guess there's nothing to do, Loring, but go to the commissioner of police."

"The commissioner of police?" Ranger drew his brows together, wincing at the thought of the attendant notoriety.

"If it comes to that—yes. There's no use fooling away time in half-measures or with private detectives. With the influence we can command, we may be able to manage so that nothing gets out, but we'll have to risk that end of it. To get the best results, I'll have to offer a reward, I suppose. How high would you be willing to go?"

"Anything." Ranger gave an indifferent wave of the hand. "Whatever is customary."

"Whatever is customary?" Mrs. Ranger was shrill in her scorn. "Tell them they can have everything we've got—everything—if they'll only give me back my daughter!"

Higby considered the matter.

"I'll tell you—we'll make it five thousand to start with. Then we can increase it to ten, if necessary. But it won't be. It won't be necessary to go to the police at all. Take my word for it, you'll have reassuring news in a very short time. Yes"—responding to Mrs. Ranger's imploring glance—"I'm confident of it." He caught her hand in a firm, hopeful clasp. "Now, keep up your courage both of you. I'm right on the job every minute, and there won't be a stone left unturned. I'll keep in touch with you, too, so that we can advise each other immediately of any developments."

"Thanks, old man." Ranger's voice was husky as he followed him to the door. "I don't know what we should have done without you."

OUTSIDE, Higby caught a passing taxicab and, giving the number of the Thorne residence, slammed the door and sank back wearily. He was distressed that his old friends should be undergoing this ordeal, and the interview with them had drawn heavily on his sympathies; but he was far from sharing their apprehensions.

"It's an elopement, of course," he muttered to himself as he lighted a cigarette. "Naturally, they can't see it—she kept the affair dark; but I'll soon worm the truth out of the Thorne girl."

It seemed for a time, though, that his promised interrogation of Lucia would have to be deferred; for on reaching the house he rang repeatedly without rousing any response, and when a sleepy servant finally appeared to answer the bell, it required all his powers of persuasion to gain admittance.

But when Mrs. Thorne came down and he had explained the nature of his errand, she readily grasped the situation, and as soon as Lucia could make a hasty toilet, sent her into the room alone.

The girl, he had to confess, seemed appalled at the news her mother had brought her and genuinely alarmed for Hope's safety. She had frequently to wipe away the tears that rolled down her cheeks; and as the inquiry proceeded, Higby became more and more satisfied that she was not endeavoring to conceal anything from him.

Answering apparently without reserve all his questions regarding every man who could by any stretch of imagination be classed as a suitor of Hope's, Lucia divulged nothing that Higby could properly term a lead. And, although she was obviously skeptical of his elopement theory, she was almost pathetically eager to aid in any way the clearing up of the girl's mysterious disappearance.

In the end, the lawyer had to admit that he had erred in believing the affair would lend itself to so easy a solution. If the missing girl had gone away deliberately, she certainly had breathed no hint of her intention to her closest friend and intimate.

This left Higby no recourse except to appeal to the police; and here he proved himself, on one score at least, a true prophet. The five thousand dollars' reward he offered furnished all the incentive required to set the department going at full steam.

WITHIN twelve hours the movements of Hope Ranger were known to a certainty from the time she left her father's door until a quarter past three that afternoon.

Leaving home, she had walked down the east side of the Avenue. At fifteen minutes to one o'clock she had stopped at a florist's and bought a gardenia. Then she had crossed at Fifty-ninth Street and met her friends at the Plaza, had gone with Lucia Thorne into the dining-room, remained there an hour, and had left the Thornes at ten minutes past two. At half after two she had bought a veil in a millinery and dressmaking establishment on Fifty-seventh Street, and had been recognized and called by name by the saleswoman. She had then looked at hats, and had been urged by another saleswoman to try on some of them. She had laughed and said she had not the time, but would be in again with her mother in a day or two. Without stopping to look at anything else, she had left the shop. From there she had gone to a book store and asked for a book which she had previously ordered. She had had this charged to her father's account, hesitated a moment before a table of magazines, and then passed through the door and into the street again.

During this entire time, according to all reports, she was always alone and quite her normal self.

She was next seen at the soda-water counter of a fruit-and-sweets shop, where she ordered a maple sundae. It was then exactly ten minutes after three, the clerk being able to fix the time so definitely from the fact that just after he had set Miss Ranger's order before her, a disturbance had been created by a customer at the cashier's desk over a question of correct change.

Miss Ranger, like every one else in the shop, had turned to watch the incident, and then, when it had been settled, she finished her drink and went out.

And from that point, the investigators ran into a blank wall. Silcott, the tailor, was just round the corner from the fruit-and-sweets shop, but she had not gone there; everybody about the place from the proprietor to the door-man was positive on that point.

After four days of assiduous effort on the part of the Police Department, aided now by an army of private detectives, no clue had been unearthed to indicate what had become of her or whither she had gone.

Mrs. Ranger was by this time under the care of physicians, ill from grief and worry; and her husband, his face lined and haggard, his straight shoulders bowed, looked twenty years older. Even Eustace Higby showed the effects of the strain.

In desperation they decided to make the facts public, and every newspaper in the country was filled with descriptions of the missing girl. Reporters by the dozens and amateur investigators by the hundred followed the trail from the Ranger house to the florist's, from the hotel to the millinery shop, thence to the book store and on to the sweets shop.

There they stopped, unable to go further.

Out from that shop Hope Ranger had stepped into the broad daylight of a mid-afternoon in April, and there, on crowded Fifth Avenue, had vanished—disappeared as utterly as the flame of a candle blown out by a puff of wind.

RANGER'S pipes are known all over the world. Buy a pipe—clay, calabash, meerschaum, brier-root or what-not, and in whatever part of the globe—and the chances are ten to one that "Ranger & Co., Makers," will be found stamped on it.

The factory and salesrooms occupy a block on Seventh Avenue near Fourteenth Street, and there, as a matter of habit, Ranger continued to go daily in the attempt to win some surcease from anxiety by absorbing himself in the accustomed routine.

But in the weeks succeeding the disappearance of his daughter, the interviews with factory executives and alert traveling salesmen had grown perceptibly shorter. His time was now almost exclusively given up to long conferences with the men who were conducting the search.

The piles of shipping lists and invoices on his desk had given way to typewritten reports from various detective agencies, chiefly remarkable for the size of the expense-accounts attached thereto.

Many a down-at-the-heels shadowing concern had cause to bless the name of Hope Ranger that summer; for the merest hint of a clue, no matter how vague or visionary, was usually enough to secure Ranger's attention. In those haunts along Broadway where the sleuths slink in and out like big black cockroaches among the butterfly swarms of actors and actresses "walking the weary," the millionaire pipe manufacturer came to be looked upon as a sort of exaggerated meal-ticket.

So ready was he to listen to every wild story or suggestion offered him that it had been found necessary to post guards before his office door to protect him from the invasion of cranks and impostors.

The gentlemen who had forsaken wire-tapping, the sale of wildcat oil stock and other similar pursuits to chance this new and lucrative game, together with the fortune-tellers, mediums, clairvoyants and plain "bugs," suddenly found themselves halted by stern investigators and forced to state their business in embarassing detail.

Thus, one morning, Number One of the cordon peremptorily halted a caller who had attempted to stroll by him, and who now, with too much assurance to be pleasing, said that he wished to see "Ranger."

The offhand manner, as well as the lack of the prefix of "Mister," annoyed the guard. Neither did he find the stranger's appearance prepossessing. Dark, lean, his clothes unpressed, his hat tilted, the man swaggered before him.

"Ranger, eh?"—with heavy sarcasm. "Well, I got to tell you that the boss is busy this morning and can't see nobody."

The visitor shifted his hat to another and more disreputable angle, took an old pipe from his pocket and began to fill it.

"You're new here, my lad; that's plain. But, if you're in doubt, take my name either to Frank Bryan or Loring himself." He closed his sack of tobacco by pulling the strings together with his teeth. "Sorry I left my card-case in my evening clothes."

The guard scowled, but wavered in his decision to throw the man out. He trusted his own impressions more than he did this airy certainty of welcome. Yet the fellow seemed so confoundedly sure.

He covered his hesitation with truculent repartee.

"Well, s'posin' I do? Who shall I say it is that wants the boss—Lloyd George or Herbert Hoover?"

"Neither." The man flicked a raveling from his sleeve. "He'll probably see me quicker if you give it to him straight. Just say, my good man, that Juarez Charlie is here."

Juarez Charlie! In the face of such a designation, Number One felt his original estimate of the man fully justified. And yet there was something in that dark, obscure glance, in the jeering smile on the glib mouth that overrode his settled judgment. Uncertainly he scratched his jaw.

"I don't know but what I'll take a chance on you," he finally decided. "You ain't so much worse than a lot I've had to let get by. But listen here"—with a return of authority—"if I get in wrong, you'd better not wait. I'm coming back, and if they don't want you, I'll just naturally wipe up the street with you."

"That's a bet." The other was still nonchalant. "And don't waste any more time. Loring will be real peevish if I tell him how you've been holding me up out here. Be sure and repeat the name right, too. It's Juarez Charlie, with the 'm' silent as in 'soup.' Get that, Clarence?"

"Fresh guy, ain't you?" growled the guard, but nevertheless started away, muttering resentfully, "Plain crook, every inch of him." As he came into the presence of Ranger's private secretary, Frank Bryan, the impulse that had led him to take in the name of the rakish visitor weakened, and he stood shuffling his feet, uncertain what to say.

"Well?" asked Bryan, without looking up from his desk.

"Mr. Bryan, sir, there's a—a party out there, that wants to see Mr. Ranger."

"A *party?*" Bryan glanced up with annoyed rebuke. "What sort of way is that to announce anybody? Didn't he give you his name?"

"Not exactly a name. He said to tell you or Mr. Ranger that Juarez Charlie——"

"Juarez Charlie!" the secretary snapped. "Why didn't you say so? Show him into the private office at once."

The bewildered guard returned to his post.

"This way, mister," he beckoned, with disgruntled civility.

"Quite a shock, wasn't it, Cuthbert? Axiom: It takes a gentleman to know a gentleman. So I forgive you. Never mind." He waved Number One aside. "I know the way."

He passed on, a privileged character, exchanging a word or two with different employees in the outer office and nodding familiarly to others; for, rolling-stone adventurer though he was, grafter and swindler as he was suspected of being, Juarez Charlie was welcome here to come and go as he pleased.

HE AND Loring Ranger had been boys together. They had started in at the same time in the shipping-room of this very factory; but whereas the one had risen step by step until he became the controlling head of the company, and by the development of his genius had vastly broadened and enlarged its activities, the other, driven by *Wanderlust* and an ineradicable strain of vagrancy, had soon drifted out. Yet, in spite of the gulf of circumstance between them, their early friendship still held.

More than once the successful manufacturer had urged his old associate to take a position with him, offering Charlie his choice either inside the factory or on the road; for it was Ranger's firm belief that the vagabond, if he would only devote himself to it, would make an incomparable salesman. But Charlie always evaded these efforts at rehabilitation.

"I couldn't breathe in a settled job," he would say. "I must have air, more air, change, variety, excitement, freedom from responsibility. This is my native element, and deprived of it I'd gasp, flop and die. As it is, I drink the wine of life, roaming where I choose and exercising my special gifts."

His special gifts were various; perhaps the less said about them the better. He employed them when he felt like it and when opportunity offered, loafed when he felt like it, traveled constantly about the country—sometimes first-class, sometimes in the company of yeggs and hoboes—boasted that he had a more comprehensive knowledge of the United States than any other man within its borders, and regarded life on the whole with a cynical, good-humored philosophy which no exigency could daunt or misfortune overwhelm.

But the careless, impudent smile he habitually wore died, his dark face softened as he entered the private office and saw the change which the burden of these torturing weeks had wrought in his old friend. He could hardly believe for a moment that it was really Loring Ranger—this bowed, melancholy man who raised his eyes with a gleam of hope at the sound of an unaccustomed step, and then when he saw who it was, muttered a perfunctory welcome.

There was an unwonted tug of sympathy at Charlie's wrinkled heart, and on a sunden impulse he stepped over and laid his hand on Ranger's shoulder.

"Tough luck, Lorry!" he said huskily. "But don't give way like this, old boy. Brace up; it isn't—it isn't as if your little girl were gone for good."

The friendly touch, the sincerity of feeling in his tone brought an unexpected response. A tremor ran through the manufacturer's bent frame; then, with a groan, he dropped his head in his hands.

"It's no use, Charlie." His voice came

brokenly. "No use to try and deceive myself. She *is* gone for good."

He turned away to hide his working face, then twisted round and began to talk rapidly. Here at last was some one to whom he could lay bare all that was in his mind.

"She is dead," he said. "Anything else is unthinkable. Of course I am going through the motions of keeping up a search, but that is chiefly for the sake of my wife. For myself, I'm not expecting to—to see Hope again. But"—his face grew livid—"I'll spend my last cent in running down the evidence and landing those— God! I can't speak; I don't dare even think of them!"

He dragged himself together with an effort that was painful to witness.

"Look at the facts, Charlie! Look at the facts! It's a month yesterday since Hope went away—was taken away, I mean—and in all that time not a word from her—not a word of her. Only this horrible silence.

"They try to tell me that she went away of herself, and is keeping quiet, so we won't know where she is." His words were pouring out now; he was letting go all the reticence and self-command he had so sternly imposed on himself. And the other man made no attempt to stop him, encouraged him, instead, by his compassionate attention, to loose this dammed-up flood of emotion.

"That's what they try to tell me; but I know better." Ranger brought his hand down on the desk. "It's a lie! No matter what she had done, where she had gone, Hope would know that she'd be welcomed back. And it wasn't in her, sensitive and tender-hearted as she was, to resist the appeals we have made in the newspapers when she could relieve us by a single word.

"Why, Charlie, we've done things that make me ashamed to think of them. We haven't trusted our own impressions and knowledge of her. We've had that young girl's life raked over as if she had been a criminal. We've had her friends and acquaintances put through a regular third degree—even shadowed some of the men she saw the most of. This or that lead—anything that could furnish a possible excuse for her to leave home—has been followed up. And not a thing has been discovered that didn't show her heart-whole, contented, without secret fads or mental quirks of any kind.

"She was abducted, of course." He dropped his hands despairingly over the arms of his chair. "I don't know how, but some way. There, on Fifth Avenue—without an outcry, without a struggle!

"And who did it? Enemies? She hadn't one on earth. I have a few, like any other successful man; but they're all the sort that damn me to hell when they hear my name and let it go at that. They're sane. Only a crazy man would take such a devil's revenge.

"The white-slaver theory has been advanced," he ran on. "But those vermin would never take such a chance. Too many less conspicuous girls whose disappearance wouldn't create much comment.

"And then the reward. A hundred thousand dollars! Why doesn't somebody claim it? Or even ask a higher ransom? A month has passed, but no demand has been made upon me.

"No!" His tormented brain reasoned back to his first conclusion "She is dead. Perhaps killed in an attempt to escape. Perhaps succumbing on their hands from the shock and terror of it all. But certainly dead.

"And that's the awfulness of it!" He hid his face in his handkerchief. "If we had laid her in her grave, I would grieve for her, but I could still bear up. But this nightmare of uncertainty, the horrible possibilities——"

Unnoticed by him in his agitation, Juarez Charlie had risen from his seat, and now stood close beside him.

"But it's all a mistake, Lorry," he whispered tensely, gripping Ranger firmly by the shoulder. "Your daughter is not dead. That is the message I was instructed to bring you. I was to tell you that she is alive and well."

THE news came too suddenly. Ranger's brain recorded the words but could not assimilate them. He had so gripped with every tentacle of his mind the conviction that Hope was dead that he could not discard it immediately for this new, reversing statement.

His bewildered stare wavered, gave way suddenly to a light that leaped to his eyes and flashed over his face.

"What? What?" His fingers bit into the flesh of Juarez Charlie's arm. "You're mad!" He was trying to protect himself from a disappointment he could not face. "You're mad!" he repeated.

Charlie wriggled free.

"I'm giving you the message exactly as I got it," he said soothingly but insistently. "Where your daughter is, I don't know, Lorry, or how to reach her. I have merely the word that she is alive and well. It may be wrong, but I don't believe it is."

"But tell me, tell me—how did you hear? Who gave you this message?" Ranger stood up, too shaken nervously to sit still. "Where did it come from?"

"I can't tell you that. I don't know myself."

"Don't know?"—indignant, astonished reproach in the exclamation. "But that's idiocy! If you're not crazy, for heaven's sake explain." He began to plead, but broke off abruptly. "Oh, I see!" he muttered, his eyes narrowing. "It's a case of nothing for nothing. Well"—turning with thinly veiled contempt to the check-book lying on his desk—"I'm willing to pay if your information is authentic. Name your price and let's get down to business."

Juarez Charlie got up, twirling his hat on his finger.

"I don't think I deserve that of you, Ranger. I've never grafted a penny off you yet, and I'm certainly not going to begin now on the strength of your being in trouble. I came here to do you a favor and relieve your mind; but since you see it only as a plant to try and bleed you——"

"Now, now, Charlie!" Ranger laid hasty hands on him to drag him back from the door. "I apologize. I had no desire to insult you. Consider the state of mind I'm in."

"Fair enough." Charlie sat down again. "I suppose you're hardly to be blamed, with every come-on artist in the country trying to shake you down. But, honest, Lorry, I've told you all I know. I couldn't do any more if you were to slip me your entire wad, pipe factory and all."

While he talked, he had produced a wisp of paper and his little sack of tobacco, and was busying himself in rolling a cigarette. Now, as he lifted it to his lips to moisten the edge of the paper with his tongue, he spoke quickly, guardedly, out of the corner of his mouth.

"Is there any chance of our being overheard here? In a minute or two, step to that door and make sure there's no one listening to us. Not as if you were looking for anybody, you understand, but in a natural way. Make an excuse that you want something outside or that it's stuffy in here—anything of the sort."

Ranger twisted his mouth impatiently at the idea of such an absurd precaution; but, willing to humor any caprice so long as Charlie was induced to talk, he nodded an assent.

SO, A moment or two later, as he paced back and forth across the floor, he suddenly flung open the door leading out of the office and almost knocked over his private secretary. The latter saved himself only by a dexterous backward jump.

"Why, Bryan!" Ranger stared at him. "What are you doing here?"

The secretary almost instantly recovered both his physical and mental balance.

"I was just about to knock," he said, coming forward in his usual deferential fashion. "Inspector Bailey has telephoned that they have another girl they would like you to look at. An aphasia victim they found wandering round Washington Square this morning."

"An aphasia victim?" Ranger's eyes glinted with the reawakened hope so many times dashed in the last few weeks by similar calls upon him for identification. "Certainly." He snatched up his hat. "I'll go right down."

But Juarez Charlie threw himself in his way as he was hurrying toward the door.

"Now, look here, Lorry," he drawled; "what's the use of getting yourself all excited over what's only another false alarm? This girl is no more your daughter than I am, and I'll bet my roll to a worn-out banana-peel on it. If somebody has to go down and give her the once-over, let Bryan, there, do it. I want you to come out with me and buy a hat."

"Buy a hat?"

"Yes; that was a part of the message I was instructed to give you, but I hadn't come to it yet, you kept breaking in so."

"A part of the message?" Ranger eyed him doubtfully. Was the man daft?

"Sure!" Charlie nodded. "I was to say to you, 'Hope is alive and well; send her a hat.' "

The private secretary turned with a start.

"Hope?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say, Juarez, that you have news of her?"

"Just what you heard." Charlie's habitual nonchalance was a bit stressed. "I was told to tell Loring, here, that his daughter was alive and well and that he was to send her a new hat."

"Yes; but who told you?" demanded the secretary excitedly. "Didn't you hold the messenger? If we can make him talk——"

"Exactly." Charlie slanted his eyebrows in an ironical grimace. "If? But, as I've been trying to explain to the boss, Frank, I've no more idea who sent that message than I have of who invented apple pie. All I can tell you is that I found it chalked up on the front stoop of my boarding-house when I came out this morning, with no signature or mark of any kind to let me know where it came from."

"But it should be photographed and preserved by all means," declared Bryan. "A competent handwriting expert might——"

Charlie gave a derisive chuckle.

"A handwriting expert would be sunk on this job before he began, Frank. It was done in hobo language—the kind of signs you see marked up on box cars and fences and freight-houses and the sides of barns when you are out on the road."

"Oh-h!" Bryan's tone indicated that, for him, the matter was dismissed. He turned to Ranger. "The sort of stuff we are getting constantly from cranks and notoriety-seekers. This is probably some yeggman's idea of a joke."

"No," disputed Charlie; "because of that part about the hat."

"The part about the hat? Why, that's the very thing that clinches it as absurd," sneered Bryan. "Would Miss Ranger be likely in a communication of this sort to ask her father for a hat? I'm surprised, Juarez, at a fellow of your shrewdness taking any stock in such an obvious fake."

"Oh, I don't pretend to be anything but a pitiable moron," disclaimed Charlie modestly; "and you are quite possibly right when you say that Miss Ranger would never think of asking for a hat. Still, I can see how a thing of the kind might come in very handy to the folks who have got her. How so, you ask? Well, this way: Suppose they'd send back a photograph of her with that hat on? It would be pretty good proof—wouldn't it?—that she was just what they said she was, alive and well—about as good proof as anybody would want.

"So that's why I say," he observed pointedly, "that you'd better be chasing down to headquarters, if anybody is to go, and leave Loring to attend to this more likely lead and get the hat on its way as quickly as possible. Savvy now, Frank?"

"That's my opinion, too," nodded Ranger, with an intimation not to be misunderstood, and the secretary, merely saying that he would look into the matter of the girl at police headquarters at once, left the room.

JUAREZ CHARLIE, rolling another cigarette, perched himself in the window and smoked until from his eyry he saw Bryan come out of the building and disappear in a subway entrance at Fourteenth Street.

"I've never got that fellow's number exactly," he muttered, as he flipped the cigarette butt down to the street below and turned back toward the desk. "Chances are he's only a bit curious, but— Anyhow, I feel safer to have him out of the way.

"And now, if you'll set that door open, Loring, so that I can see if anybody else comes circulating around, I'll shake down a few things that I've been holding up my sleeve."

He paused a moment as if hesitating just how to begin; then, leaning forward, he spoke in a voice so carefully lowered that it was hardly more than a whisper.

"Lorry, what I am going to tell you is known to every 'gun' and grafter and worker in the so-called underworld, big or little; but it's mighty seldom spoken of even among themselves. The police don't know it. All they get on to is what their stool-pigeons tell 'em, and it would have to be a nervier snitch than any I've ever seen that would dare breathe this to a cop.

"I'm running the biggest risk of my life in tipping you off." The serious set of his devil-may-care face, the drawn lines about his mouth showed that he had no doubts on this score. "And, although I've had my suspicions right along, I wouldn't come to you until I was absolutely certain. But now I'm going through with it—if it's the last thing I ever do.

"Loring"—he drew a long breath, like a swimmer about to make a dive, then brought his words out with a rush—"your daughter, I'm sorry to tell you, is in the hands of the Combine."

"The Combine?" repeated Ranger.

"Sh," Charlie cautioned. "Not so loud."

"But what do you mean by the 'Combine'?" Ranger persisted, although he somewhat impatiently lowered his tone.

"Just what you'd imagine. An inside bunch that runs things—the same as in politics or finance."

"Are you trying to tell me"—Ranger showed his skepticism—"that crime has become an organized thing in this city, controlled and directed by a board or group such as you describe?"

Charlie nodded vehemently.

"Not only in this city but all over the country," he declared. "Don't you read the newspapers? Look at the frequent robberies on a big scale, not money and securities alone, but jewels, silks, furs, merchandise in car-load lots. How could plunder of that sort be disposed of unless there was an organization to manage it? That's the Combine, and it runs the whole show.

"Ah, you still don't believe me?"—as Ranger gave a contemptuous sniff. "Well, you just pick out the most God-forsaken crossroads you can think of, and go there to try and work it on your own hook, and see where you come out."

"Then, if a pocket is picked in Omaha, or a grocery store robbed in Lansing, Michigan, it has all been planned and dictated by a central bureau here in New York? Rot! Why, Charlie, such a thing——"

"No, no, Lorry; you don't get me. I'm not saying that the jobs are planned and ordered from here—that is, none except the big ones. It's like—well, it's a good deal like the way things used to be on Wall Street."

"The so-called money trust, that we used to hear so much about." Ranger nodded reminiscently. "And you want to claim there is an organizing genius among the criminals?"

"That's just what I mean," affirmed Charlie.

"But I don't see how it could be managed," frowned Ranger; he was taking Charlie's statements a shade more seriously. "Banks have fixed places of doing business and men of responsibility in charge. Anybody, though, might set up as a crook—Tom, Dick or Harry. How, then, is it possible for this 'Combine,' as you call it, to exercise control?"

"Easy. As you say, anybody might 'rip a pete'—crack a safe, I mean—or do a job of porch-climbing; but don't forget, Loring, that the stuff has to be got rid of after they get it."

"Oh? The 'fences,' eh?"

"Sure. The fences and the cops. That's where the Combine gets its stranglehold on the business. They've got the low-down on every fence from Maine to California, open or secret; and woe be to the one that steps out of line. Through the fences, too, they control the cops. If an outsider butts in or a regular welshes, he is tipped off. So what chance has a poor 'gun' got? He has to come across with half out of every haul he makes or quit the game."

"And the men at the top rely for safety, I suppose, on the traditional 'honor among thieves?' "

"Honor among thieves?" Juarez Charlie gave a short laugh. "There ain't no such animal. Not on your life, Loring! Those lads at the top are like the 'man higher up' in politics. Even more so; for there must be somebody who has a hold on the man higher up. But you can't even make a guess at the crowd in the Combine, especially the Big Noise who is at the head of them. You can follow the chain up through the fences just so far; then you hit a blank wall. Orders after that come, as I got mine this morning, through messages chalked up in hobo language. But, if you know what's good for you, those messages will be obeyed."

RANGER yielded to a growing conviction that there was more in this than mere imaginings or a fantastic embroidery on a few unrelated facts. Improbable as it seemed, there was at least some basis for Charlie's revelation—enough to go on.

"And you think"—his voice trembled—"that this inner group—this Combine—have my daughter?"

"I'm certain of it. It isn't often that they pull off anything on their own account. But after that message I received—well, that settles it in my mind that this is one of the times they've done it. Loring"—he spoke gravely—"it's what you called the 'organizing genius' himself that you're stacked up against in this deal."

Ranger reached quickly for the telephone on his desk; but Charlie, anticipating his action, seized it first.

"No, you don't!" He held the instrument tight in both hands. "I can see your mouth made up for 'Spring, 3100' as plain as if you were already calling it. What I've told you was for your own information, Loring, and not to be passed on to the police."

Ranger made no attempt to deny his purpose.

"Don't be a fool!" He blustered a bit. "You'll not prevent me by hanging on to that 'phone; there are others I can use. Certainly you can't suppose that I'll be blocked from repeating what you've told me by any scruples—regarding it as confidential."

"Oh, no." Charlie was frankly cynical. "It isn't any scruples that'll hold you back; it's your own common sense—as soon as you've had a chance to think for a minute. Haven't I already told you that this crowd has the police—well, what a real-estate dealer would call, 'firm in hand?' "

Ranger gave over his attempt to use the telephone and sank back.

"What am I to do?" He ran his hands up through his thick gray hair. "If I don't report this information to the police——"

"If you do"—Charlie spoke sharply—"you're done for. Get that into your head, Loring. These people are under cover so deep that there's about as much chance of a detective getting to them as there is of his drilling into the vaults of the National City Bank with a baby's rattle. No; this isn't a case where the police can help you."

"Apparently, it isn't a case where anybody can help me," muttered Ranger hopelessly.

"No; don't say that." Charlie gave a quick glance of pity at the other's tormented face.

The unwonted note of sympathy in his grating voice lifted Ranger momentarily from his dejection. A faint smile of appreciation flickered across his lips.

"Oh, you, of course. I know that I can always count on you. But what can you and I do alone?"

"What have your cops and your high-priced detectives and the biggest reward ever offered done for you?" the answer flashed back. "There's a chance to get your daughter, as I see it, Lorry; but it'll never be by depending on the police. This has got to be worked on a different tack. You think I'm not much?" He grinned; nothing could long repress his care-free spirit. "Maybe so. But remember, please, that when Mr. Lion got all tangled up in the net, it was friend Mouse who came along and gnawed him free. That's the rôle I've cast myself for, Loring—li'l Mousie."

Through the obsession—his lost daughter—that filled Ranger's mind to the exclusion of everything else, there pierced some realization of what the vagrant was so lightly offering—his life, perhaps, if they were really pitted against so ruthless and formidable an adversary as he described.

The matter-of-fact manufacturer was hardly ready to credit that assumption in its entirety, but he could not doubt that Juarez Charlie, with far more knowledge than himself of the characters and methods of the underworld, believed it implicitly. And on one score, at least, Charlie's reasoning was irrefutable—the keenest detectives in the country had failed; the machinery of the law had proved powerless; he had squandered money like water, and there was nothing to show for it.

WHY not, then, accept this generous, unbought aid tendered him? He would search far to find an ally of quicker wits or a deeper knowledge of criminal subtleties.

Ranger's success in life was largely due to his habit of quick decision. With scarcely a pause he reached out and gripped Charlie's hand in a clasp that told more than he could have expressed in an hour's speech.

"Handle it your own way, old man," he said heartily. "I'm with you. I'll back you with everything I've got."

"That will help—a little," said Charlie dryly.

He fell into a reverie, his dark face twisted up reflectively, his yellow cigarette stained fingers tapping on the arm of his chair.

"You said a while back," he remarked at last, "that it looked to you, Loring, like we were up against a blank wall. Well, we are; but there's one opening in that wall, and it's through the messages they'll send. Take this hat we've been ordered to furnish. Somebody's got to get it and carry it to them. Then, if that person is trailed and we find out where the hat is delivered, we'll be getting pretty warm to the people we're after."

THE suggestion seemed to Ranger an immediate solution of the whole problem, and he was eager to lose no time in putting it into execution; but Charlie checked his enthusiasm.

"No," he advised. "They'll be on the lookout. Let one or two messages go by, though, with just a bungling attempt to follow, and they'll begin to grow careless. That'll be our time to start trailing."

"But how do you know there will be further messages?"

"How do I know that Christmas is coming? You don't suppose they're sending for that bonnet merely to doll your daughter up, do you? As I told you, they'll send you a photograph of her wearing it to prove to you that she's alive and well, and then they'll begin to apply the screws."

"Demand money, do you mean? But why haven't they done so before? This communication through you is the first word I have received either directly or indirectly."

"Sure. They wanted you to try the cops and all the rest of it, and learn just how tight they had you tied up. Now that they think you're desperate, they're ready to do business."

"But all this circumlocution—this nonsense of sending a hat and one thing and another—seems silly to me," objected Ranger, pushing out his lip. "All I want is my daughter. Can't you chalk up a message of the same kind you received, telling them I am ready to meet any terms they propose?"

"Terms?" Charlie's glance was significant. "Believe me, Lorry, those birds are planning to strip you bare. They'll never be satisfied with anything less than your whole roll."

"Then let them have it!" Ranger did not hesitate a second. "I'm ready to start in all over again, if only my daughter——"

Charlie shook his head.

"It wouldn't do you any good. Those wolves don't know what mercy is. They'll never hand over the girl, with the chance of her telling something that might give them away. No; what they're planning is to string you along on one excuse or another until they've milked you dry. Then they'll quietly croak her and end the matter up.

"Your only hope, Loring—I'm giving it to you straight—is to play the game the way they've laid it out for you and try to catch them napping before they've got you plumb skinned. If you'll——"

His alert glance caught sight of the returning Bryan making his way toward them through the outer office, and, without altering his attitude, he changed his tone to one of querulous expostulation.

"If you'll quit your arguing and do as I say, we'll soon see if there's anything in it or not. A hat isn't going to set you back more than twenty-five or thirty dollars, and you'd hand that out any day to one of your high-priced 'dicks' and think nothing of it."

"Oh, come along, then." Ranger took his cue in a way that even Charlie had to approve. "But mind you"— he got up with the air of yielding against his judgment—"I haven't the slightest hope that anything will come of it.

"Ah, Bryan"—with an assumption of eagerness—"you saw the girl at headquarters? Did she— No? Only another disappointment, eh?"

Sighing, he picked up his hat, and he and Charlie left the office. Outside, he dismissed his chauffeur, and, driving the car himself, proceeded to a millinery shop on a cross-street in the Fifties.

When the odd pair entered this feminine Mecca of cunningly arranged mirrors and carefully tinted walls, the strayed princess who received them gave the sugared languor of her smile exclusively to Ranger; the other person was, of course, impossible. But after she had brought out several hats, setting forth with soft fluency the desirability of each, Ranger failed to meet her expectations. He appeared more bewildered and uncertain every minute.

It was then that Juarez Charlie boldly projected himself into the situation.

"You've got the wrong steer altogether, little one," he said briskly. "These lids are all right for Fifth Avenue; but we want something that will stand out like a Polish flag in a German street-parade—something so out of style that no swell dame would be caught dead in it, or so into style that if it showed up along Forty-second Street, they'd have to call out the reserves. Do you get me, Fanchon?"

A more human smile broke through the veneer of the princess's superiority. He was speaking her language. Fresh; she'd say so, but he knew what he wanted all right and was able to spill it so that she could understand. Only discipline, environment and the presence of Ranger prevented her from replying in kind.

"Ah?" She hastily relegated the toque she was balancing on two fingers to a table and permitted herself to descend to a vulgar interest. "Is it perhaps for some lady of the stage to wear in a character part?"

"You've got it, sister. Just think of what Marie Dressler would wear as the belle of Hickville when she first hits Paris."

The princess was genuinely intrigued. She sought, she found a bizarre shape, gave it a pinch in here, a flare-out there, thus immeasurably heightening its absurdity. She pinned on towering spirals of ribbon, and trailed feathers a shoulder-length over the brim.

"Do you approve?" she asked, glancing up archly as she placed it on her head.

"Couldn't be better!" Charlie was enthusiastic. "Now run, Bright Eyes, and sew it together with your own pretty fingers."

Ranger hurriedly placed a bill in those same fingers, and she went, humming a song, to return presently with the completed hat in a box. As Ranger paid for it, Charlie was forced to revise his estimate of the cost of women's headwear. A parting compliment or so to the princess, and he seized the hat-box and carried it out to the car.

A LONG drive was before them, their objective Charlie's lodgings. These were in a stark, detached house sadly in need of paint in an isolated neighborhood on the outskirts of Brooklyn.

"We'll know now just how closely we're being spied on," he commented, as they swung through a huddle of mean suburban streets and across a railroad track to reach it. Then as they drew up before the gate, he gave a sudden exclamation and leaped out to examine three rude chalk marks scrawled as though a child had done it across one of the posts of the sagging paling.

"Look, Lorry! They're playing it exactly as I doped. And it's just as I told you, too; we can't make a move but they're wise to it."

"What is it? Another message?" demanded Ranger, who had climbed out of the car and was also bending over to inspect the marks.

"No; but it tells where the message is to be found." And, beckoning his companion to follow, he started for the railroad tracks just below.

A short distance from the crossing was a siding with a string of box cars standing on it. Charlie pointed to them.

"That's where we'll find the message all right," he announced confidently. But although they went over the entire line of cars, no sign of anything resembling a communication was to be found.

Nonplused and puzzled, they rushed back to the house to see if they could possibly have mistaken the directions chalked on the fence-post. But, no; as Charlie deciphered the hieroglyphics, the plain instructions were to seek the message down along the railway.

"Maybe we came too quick, before the fellow had a chance to chalk her up," muttered Charlie. Then, as his roving glance fell on the motor, he started and gasped: "By Godfrey, Lorry! Somebody's come along and swiped the hat!"

He was right. The large, gaily decorated box which they had left on the rear seat of the tonneau was gone. With a common impulse the two hastened over to the side of the car and looked in to see if, by any chance, it could have fallen to the floor.

It had not. But as they gazed, Charlie made a sharp exclamation.

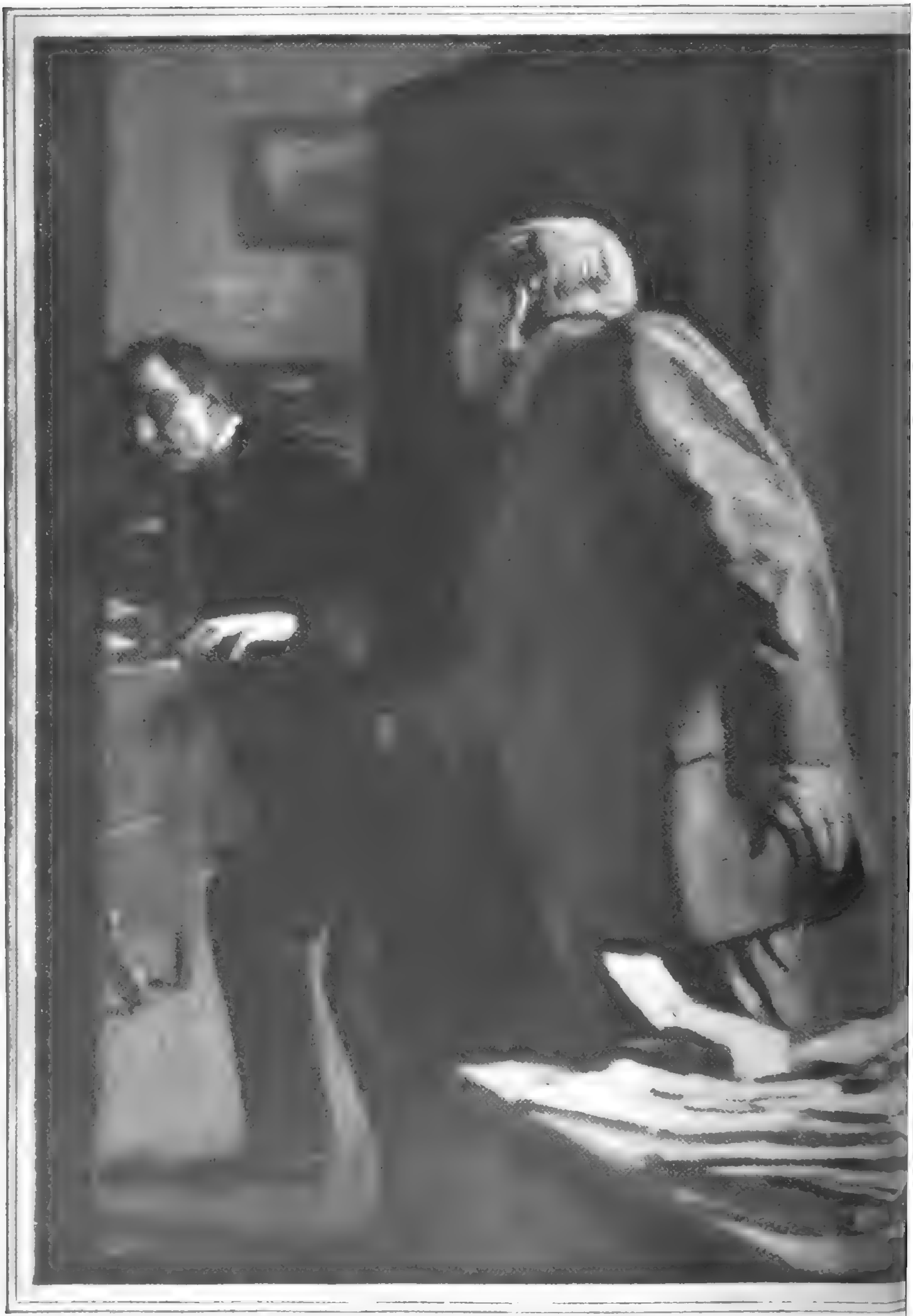
There upon the cushion of the seat where the box had rested was chalked a circle with a rough cross-mark in the center of it—the sign-manual of the Combine.

Charlie stood looking far more guilty than if he had been detected in a theft.

"Fooled!" He began to swear under his breath. "Go on, Lorry; say anything you like. You can't call me anything worse than I'm calling myself."

But Ranger was in no mood for reproaches. On the contrary, he was inclined to draw encouragement from the incident. The hat was gone, and he took it as proof that Hope was alive. So far, at least, Charlie's theory was vindicated.

"You said we must bungle one or two times in order to render them careless," he returned generously. "Well, we've done it. What more do you want?"



Ranger suddenly flung open the door and almost knocked over his private secretary. The latter saved hi

only by a dexterous backward jump. "Why, Bryan!" Ranger stared at him. "What are you doing here?"

"Maybe some one saw them." Charlie had floundered up from the dust of his humiliation, and his eyes were darting up and down the empty street. He caught sight of his landlady sewing at an upper window and dashed inside.

But his inquiry of her elicited only the information that during the absence of himself and Ranger another automobile had driven up and had stopped before the house as if to make some slight repairs. It had halted but a moment or two, and then had driven on again. The chauffeur who got out was a young man, she thought, but she couldn't see his face. She couldn't describe the car, and she wasn't sure whether there were others in it or not.

"So, there's that!" Charlie shrugged his shoulders as they started back to town. "Clever work to send us off on a wild-goose chase among those freight-cars while they gypped us of the creation. Nothing to do now, of course, but wait for the next message. Only"—he dug viciously in his tobacco-sack—"they don't catch me asleep at the switch again."

THE May breeze caught up a sheet of newspaper and sent it scudding down the road. It headed straight for the ditch, hung a moment on the brink of a little pool of stagnant water, and then, with the sudden veering of a stronger wind, was lifted high in air and carried over a lofty brick wall and privet hedge. It blew along the grass within the enclosure until it flapped against the trunk of a large beech tree, and there it lay.

George Kelsey, strolling about the grounds, saw it, and his listless expression changed to one of avid interest, immediately suppressed. Before he took a step toward it, though, he looked about him, his indifferent glance embracing the whole scene—the large house with its bright awnings and wide porches, the smooth green lawns where circular sprinklers were playing like miniature fountains, every clump of shrubbery. Near him a gardener was bending over a flower-bed, but Kelsey knew that although the man was intent on his work, he was observant.

Kelsey yawned and sauntered over toward a rustic bench under the beech tree. Sheltered for a moment by its trunk, he stooped quickly, crumpled the stained, frayed paper in his hand, folded it roughly and laid it between the pages of his book. Then seating himself on the rustic bench, he opened the volume and began to read.

One of the most rigidly observed rules of this exclusive private hospital for what are euphemistically called "nervous cases" was that no reading-matter was permitted which might excite the patients or rouse discussion among them. There was a carefully selected library. But newspapers were banned.

Consequently, to Kelsey, as ignorant of world happenings and the progress of events as if he were on a desert island, the discovery of this paper was as exciting and momentous a circumstance as the glimpse of a sail to a shipwrecked crew.

It was disappointing, though, for him to find that he had only a stray sheet of a Sunday supplement two or three weeks old, entirely taken up with the disappearance of a girl called Hope Ranger and illustrated with pictures of her reproduced from photographs, paintings and sketches. No doubt by this time the girl had been found.

Still it was news, even if it was not of a kind that particularly interested him. Having read to the end, he put the paper in his pocket and the fate of Hope Ranger out of his mind.

He had more important and personal questions to consider. Laying his book on the bench beside him, he sat with his arms folded, staring at the ground before him, too deeply absorbed in his own predicament to hear light footfalls on the grass.

The sense of some one being near him rather than the perception of an actual presence roused him finally from his brown study, and he looked up. A girl was standing a few feet away from him, regarding him steadily, her hands clasped before her.

The involuntary smile of recognition died on his lips as he stood up. He had thought at first— A resemblance only, but to whom? Where had he seen—recently? He grasped it. One of the nurses, Miss Copley. He had talked to her the day before.

But he had now a swift impression of grace and charm, of a distinction which the nurse did not possess. His brain ticked off these notes as the habit of observation continued mechanically to function; but they were superseded, nullified, by some strange emotional realization of her—an ephemeral experience outside the measurements of time, lasting the infinitesimal fraction of a second, gone.

HE STOOD waiting for her to speak; but she said nothing—only continued to gaze at him with heavy, shadowed eyes.

"Good-morning!" He broke the silence, which was becoming awkward. "For a moment I thought you were Miss Copley."

"Did you?" she asked vaguely. Her voice confirmed the impression of charm. It was warm, faintly vibrating.

"Miss Copley is a nurse here," he explained. "She resembles you very much. I thought she might be your sister."

"Sister?" she echoed in the same monotonous tone. "I have no sister." She stopped and considered this, her brows twisting. "I don't think I have a sister."

She came nearer him and sat down on the bench, motioning him to resume his seat.

"You have a newspaper," she stated, with a directness which would have struck him as odd if he had noticed it.

"You saw that?" he exclaimed, annoyed as much at the necessity for subterfuge in such trifling matters as at being found out. "A silly rule to forbid them." He shrugged his shoulders. Then curiosity to hear what she would say made him add, "Are you going to give me away?"

"Certainly not!"—a touch of disdain in her surprise. If he had known it, she was dismayed at the promptness of her answer. "I did say, 'newspaper,' then?" she asked naively. "I forget so easily that I might just as well have said table-cloth, or garden gate, or something else as ridiculous. They say I do often."

"There are others." Kelsey felt a sudden desire to console her. "I heard a man at breakfast this morning ask for two bales of hay fried on one side."

A delightfully humorous smile curved her lips and then was gone, lost in the vacuity that returned to her expression.

"I don't understand it." She shook her head. "I don't understand anything. I don't even know whether I have met you before or not."

He looked down at her.

"I never saw you until just now."

"Are you a patient here, too?"

At her question, a flare of anger swept over Kelsey's face, which slowly congealed to an icy repression.

"Am I a patient?" He had turned in his seat, and she saw that the flame still lingered in his hot blue eyes. There were white dents about the corners of his mouth; his voice was rough; the inflections were satirical. "Well, that is as you look at it. I was house physician here for a few weeks. I resigned—for reasons. My resignation was accepted, and I packed my things and prepared to leave. I needed a car to take me to the station, as it is some distance. There were polite excuses—all the cars were in use. I started to walk, hoping I'd get a lift on the road; the gates were locked. I attempted to throw my bags over the wall and scramble after them. Two men closed in on me. I lost my head and struck out, but they were too much for me. Our superintendent had grown so fond of me, you see, that he couldn't bear for us to part. So he elevated me to the rank of a patient. I am still here—for the present."

"That means—you intend to get away?" she leaned nearer him to whisper.

"I—will—get—away! I——"

He stopped short and swept his hand back over his light ruddy hair, flushing sullenly over the realization that he was making an ass of himself to run on this way to one of the inmates of the hospital, who, if she were able to follow him at all, would probably babble every word he had said to the next person she met.

"I'm talking nonsense," he began stiffly; but she touched him lightly on the arm.

"Dr. Bristow is coming," she murmured. "Give me a pencil quick, and wait here. I will come back—if I can."

Wondering alike at the quick change in her manner and at the purpose of her request, he gave her the pencil, and she moved away, to stand listlessly turning it in her hands and looking vacantly before her.

The superintendent of the institution came striding across the lawn toward them. He was a man of about medium height; but his erect bearing gave the impression of size.

In feature, too, he was impressive, even extraordinary—heavy dark brows over strikingly keen slate-gray eyes; a firm, clean-shaven mouth and chin, and thick dark hair growing far down on the nape of the neck.

As always, he was fastidiously dressed—a gray morning suit and gray soft hat.

"Well, Miss Copley"—he stopped before

the girl and spoke in the sympathetic, slightly bantering tone of a physician to a convalescent patient—"this is better than moping over rejected manuscripts, don't you think?"

She still stared before her.

"He gave me this pencil," she said; "but he wouldn't give me any paper." She moved on droopingly toward the house.

"Good-morning, Kelsey." Dr. Bristow's voice was low. "You have been making friends with Miss Copley, I see."

The remark was casual, but Kelsey divined undercurrents.

"Is that her name?" he asked uninterestedly. "I thought it might be. Sisters?"

The doctor's eyes were on him.

"Yes—a sad case. Hopeless, I fear. She wanted to be a writer. I have seen some of her manuscripts. Pretty bad. There was one fair story, though, of a little seamstress who fell in love with an actor's picture. He played *Mercutio*. That was one of your favorite parts, I believe."

"You're in one of your inventive moods to-day," Kelsey said insolently. His longing to administer a stiff punch to Bristow's jaw was more intense than usual this morning. But he had sense enough to restrain it.

"Have you entirely forgotten the hit you made in that part?" Bristow was now, as Kelsey expressed it to himself, baiting him for fair. "Can't you recall the duel scene where you stagger back into the arms of your supporters, the house still? ''Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'twill serve. A plague o' both your houses!' Then the thunders of applause."

Kelsey was a little pale from his effort at self-control; his mouth was rigid.

"Who that had ever lived through such an inspiring experience could forget it?" he murmured with exaggerated enthusiasm.

"Good!" Bristow's tone was gratified. "You are coming along nicely, my dear boy."

WITH a pleasant nod, he turned and stepped back to the drive where his car was waiting. A moment more, and he was whirling through the gates, the big noiselessly running machine no greater an example than himself of controlled, coordinated force.

Kelsey's face was black as he looked after him. Lost in his resentment and sense of injury, he had forgotten the girl. It was with a start he realized that she had come back and was seating herself beside him. Suspicions, surmises, doubts ran helter-skelter through his mind.

"Give me some paper," she said imperatively.

Studying her, curious to see what she would say or do next, Kelsey took a notebook from his pocket and, tearing out a few sheets, handed them to her.

She began to write—words, half-words, dots, dashes, anything. Her head was bent over the paper. Any one watching her would have thought her absorbed in her task.

But, while she wrote, she talked in a rapid undertone.

"You are an actor," she said accusingly. "I overheard some of the things he said to you. Perhaps you were only acting when you spoke of him to me. And yet—oh, no"—she clutched her pencil and paper tight—"I can't believe that. I saw your face. You couldn't——"

"I never was an actor," he interrupted harshly. "That's Bristow's little game. I am what I told you, George Kelsey, a physician who has specialized in mental diseases. But who are you? That's more to the point just now. I made a snap diagnosis of you, when I saw you first, as a drug-addict—your pallor, your eyes. But they don't admit them here. Amnesia, then? That means your memory of past events is blotted out. And I don't believe, for all you say, that yours is even touched."

"No! No!" Her voice was anguished, but her meaningless scribbling went steadily on.

"Aphasia was a possibility, saying 'tablecloth' when you mean 'newspaper' and all that. You said you did, but I have noticed no lapses of the sort. Paranoia? Dementia præcox?" He shook his head. "You would have confided to me your persecutions or delusions. But your own ego is far from uppermost. You have been studying mine, trying to draw me out. Why?" he demanded. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

What was the girl doing there? That is a question in which you will be even more deeply interested when you read the next instalment of "Swallowed Up" in May EVERYBODY'S—out April 15th.

Journey to the South Seas with a New Author

The Lotus Bride

It's Always a Pleasure for Everybody's to Present an Unknown Writer, Particularly One Who Has Written Such a Refreshingly Original Piece of Work as This

By Hrolf Wisby

A HATFUL of wind out of nowhere came sailoring across the placid face of early dawn—the false dawn of the mid-Pacific. Through the gleaming foliage of the *artu* trees a glimpse was seen of the blue lagoon beyond.

The dreamy deep blinked in a momentary shiver—or was it the scintillating train of a fairy robe that trailed across the surface? And once more the lagoon relapsed into reverie between earth and sky—calm, lovely, haunting.

The placid lagoon was guarded against the blows of the great green seas of the trades by a curving barrier-reef of white-stone coral, which blossomed into a top rim of amber-and-purple clusters, aglow with hidden fires. Against this protecting arm of living stone the ocean thundered in heavy surges, filling the valleys of the islands with the measured boom of its roar as it spurted the foam in brilliant showers against the rainbow reef of coral already warming under the first rays of dawn.

As the true dawn broke, three men became visible on the shore of the lagoon. They strode slowly across the blinding flare of coral sand and squatted down in the purple shadow of the *purao* palms. They were whites—three bad spots on the virgin napery of Samoa. But in those tremendous latitudes, man, good or bad, weak or strong, is a mere nonentity.

None of the three had given his proper name. They had long since arrived at a stage when an alias is adopted as a matter of course.

Kedge was perhaps the arch-type of the trio. A monocle in his left eye remained the only distinctively European note in his get-up, otherwise quite insular after the manner of the lived-in South Sea trader. He was the sole owner of Kedge & Company, South Sea merchants, and had managed to hoard a snug penny in the gentle game of exchanging cheap trade goods for the valuable copra of the natives.

Sluisser was a Dutchman of the old "blackbirding" type, a spineless monster rolling in his own fat, who had long since retired with the reputation of being the oldest white trader in the settlement. For some mysterious reason, the Kanakas persisted in regarding him as the uncrowned white king of the island. And, even more mysteriously, he was generally considered a "fine gentleman when sober," though no one on the island could be found who had ever seen him in a state of even comparative sobriety. Sluisser functioned at times, in his jovial, maudlin manner, as the unofficial magistrate in petty local squabbles. Strangely enough, the man seemed to have more power with the natives drunk than the government officials in Pago-Pago sober.

Hunter, an American rover, was the newcomer on the island. As the black sheep of a prominent and affluent American family, he had fallen by easy stages to the level of a wandering ne'er-do-well. Disowned by his father for his escapades, and tearfully despaired of by his mother for the same reason, he had bummed round the seven seas of casual adventure until even his comrades shunned him. With his last dollar invested in a stock of trade goods sold him by Kedge at a rollicking profit, Hunter had set himself up in business on the beach under the shingle of "Hunter & Company, South Seas Merchants." Under this new label, he, who was just turning thirty-eight, imagined himself "settled" in trade, but this was merely Hunter on the surface, subject to a million chameleon transformations. Below the surface, in his inner I, the rover was a very much disillusioned man with the soul of an artist crushed under the débris of madcap adventure. Without seeming to realize it himself, he had arrived at the crucial turn when the stalwart frame and the schooled mind are on the verge of succumbing to never-ending debauch and abuse.

The three men had been smoking and chatting idly at intervals, Hunter gradually dropping out under the spell of the morning star as he watched it flicker and wane in the flood of ruddy light welling out of the east.

Kedge jerked him back to earth again by suggesting a "wife" now that he had become a regular merchant.

"What about yourself?" the American almost yawned.

"Oh, my dear boy, we have had wives galore—all sorts, you know," croaked Kedge, meaning himself and the Dutchman. "A fellow can't help it, I suppose—not in these latitudes. But it does make a fellow beastly philosophical in the end, and, if I may venture, rather timid—eh, what, Slusher?"

Kedge's pipe-stem pointed at Sluisser, who was too concerned with uncorking a fresh bottle of gin to notice the slurring pronunciation, and who only dimly gathered what had been said.

Kedge squeezed out a thin, mean smile of commiseration. Hunter stared blankly into the rolling orb. Sluisser took a ferocious swig by way of an eye-opener.

There was a ripple on the burnished mirror of the lagoon as a cloud of Kanaka girls, garbed in nothing but their silken blue-black hair, broke water after a long dive. Presently they passed by on the shore.

"Quite unlike the gross-looking hussies you were messing about with in the Ladrones, eh?" Hunter felt the jab of Kedge's pipe-stem on his shoulder. "If our Mr. Slusher were a poet in addition to being a philosopher, we should have had a ripping ode to the amazons of the South Seas; shouldn't we, Mr. Slusher?"

"Brobably," grunted the Dutchman, with the vague assent of a man who does not gather whether he is being made game of or not.

One of the girls, who had been taking her morning bath apart, remained behind. Standing on a coral ledge aglow with the light of dawn, she was drying a head of hair that reached almost to her knees.

Hunter fixed her with a rather calloused eye, but as he continued to stare, his glance became less critical and more appreciative. By and by something resembling a sense of serious regard crept into his eye, and, as if this might be in the nature of a tacit signal, Kedge cut in and told her story.

SHE was Vaima, daughter of a king in distant Nuka-Hiva, of the Marquesas group, who was murdered by a pretender. Her stepmother escaped with her from the island in a canoe, taking along the dead body of her father to prevent it from being baked and eaten by the murderer and his family, which would have been according to official etiquette in those parts. The two women spent fully a week on the open ocean, followed by a pack of sharks attracted by the stench of the body decomposing in the burning sun, before they were picked up by a schooner and brought the long way to Samoa. Vaima was therefore a stranger on the island, but as a member of the ancient native royalty of the Marquesans, considered the premier blood of the South Sea dynasties, she was held in high esteem by Moku-Moku, native king of the island. Due to the schooling she had received from the missionaries, Vaima had risen above the rank and file of the other Kanaka girls, with the curious result that she had come to nurse a secret hatred of the white race as usurpers in the lands that belonged to her people by birthright.

As Kedge was finishing his tale, the young amazon was moving along the rim of the lagoon surrounded by a fluttering halo of pigeons—the Papuan sort that have little teeth in their bills—which she was feeding with the seeds of the breadfruit.

Kedge hailed her. Having had an example of this gentleman's "superior" culture before, Vaima feigned not to hear him. Thereupon the big Dutchman grabbed the bottle and contrived to blow his drunken breath obliquely into it, making a very good imitation of a steam-whistle. This signal brought up the girl. Soon she was standing before the three white men with the noble bearing for which her race is justly famous. Kedge planted his bomb with sinister speed.

"White chief here wants marry Vaima, daughter of King of Nuka-Hiva—savvy?"

Hunter felt himself redden under his coat of lived-in tan. The others were perfectly unconcerned, but the calm on Vaima's innocent face was like that of the golden lagoon—mysterious and unfathomable.

In that brief moment, when the three white men were taking her measure, the soul of Vaima traveled back to her ancestors—the gorgeous ancient monarchs of the Polynesian paradise—only to return as swiftly with a message that she locked in her heart.

Vaima cast down her eyes. She began to dig her toes into the warm white-coral sand. She lifted her gaze and smiled, only to cast down her eyes bashfully again. Once more she raised her eyes, and now they were large and serious. She met Hunter's bewildered glance squarely with the deep, searching fire of the instinct primeval. She looked him through and through as no eye had penetrated him before, and he felt the power and innocence of nature, naked and savage, streaming over him in waves of hallowed delight. For the first time in his life he realized that he was face to face with a soul—the untrammeled soul of a woman made to nature's liking—and the wee speck of matter in his inner I proclaimed its manhood.

He seemed to hear the voice of Kedge croaking, as from a distance, "Well, what d'ye say?" and was surprised to find him right at his elbow; but the question was intended for Vaima. She stood stock-still for an instant. Then she was off with a bound, like a wild, graceful thing of the jungle, and out of sight in no time.

"What's it all mean?" Hunter found himself asking, but his voice was not as hard as usual.

Kedge, who was watching the bounding girl narrowly until swallowed by the bush, made a face like one who has lost a trick at poker.

"You're as good as married," he answered dryly.

"And you're as good as crazy!" snorted Hunter, now quite recovered. "Why, the girl didn't make a yip!"

"Wait and see," prophesied Kedge.

"Anyvay, let's trink to de pride," was the only excuse the big Dutchman could find for pausing so long on such a foolish theme as that of Woman.

THE following morning at four, as the false dawn broke in the east, Hunter was still asleep in his shack. A swarthy, bony hand raised the flap of the coco matting. A ray of pallid light struck Hunter's face. He raised up his head and saw, crouching over him, the dark form of a ghastly creature with small eyes burning like live coals, and a toothless mouth sputtering forth a stream of gibberish. Hunter had to pinch himself before he could realize that he was not facing the nightmare of fantastic dreaming but what was plainly an old witch persisting with strange incantations in a weird, crooning undertone. She appeared insensible to Hunter's remonstrance, nor would she let him leave the shack when he sought to free himself from the ghoulish spell she was evidently casting upon him. But no sooner had the false dawn gone and the great orb in the east started to set the heavens aflame than the witch stopped short and, prostrating herself before him, left a bundle done up in ceremonial wrappings. Away she scampered with the helpless flutter of a winged creature that has been crippled by the hunter.

The American unrolled the matting and found a small roast pig done up in the aromatic leaves of mountain-laurel.

The pig was conclusive. Hunter knew enough of Island ethics to divine what it meant; at least, he believed he did. Nevertheless, he thought it might be opportune to play the fool before Kedge on a chance of finding out if that mysterious person might have had a finger in the pie.

On his way over, Hunter came upon a gang of native "toddy" cutters as they were making ready to scale the stems in a coco patch. The cheerful "*Kaōha*" of the men induced Hunter to inquire if they had seen Kedge stirring. One of the cutters, who had reached his perch aloft in the crown of a tall *palmisle* overtopping the jungle roof, called down that he could see Kedge making trail for the devil-devil tabu in the High Places. The American coaxed the men until they unbosomed themselves.

Kedge, they told him, was virtually king in the High Places, which contained some of the most valuable copra on the island. Nobody dared set foot there because Kedge had declared it tabu and filled it with powerful white devils. No Kanaka could venture into those mountain wilds without danger of being roasted alive over slow-burning coco-husk fires and eaten by the voracious white devils of the sacred tabu. They knew, these children of nature, for had not many a good man and brave of their tribe left his bones there?

Mystified at the moment when he fancied he was picking up a clue, Hunter sauntered along until he found himself in front of Kedge's store. The door was closed and locked. On the rail of the veranda was a row of small carved wooden idols and "spirit-chasers," fantastically painted and festooned with colored feathers. These grotesque toys were pivoted so that the slightest puff of wind would set the whole spirit circus into a giddy whirl.

At a respectful distance Hunter discovered a small band of natives sitting in the fern brake with bales of sun-dried copra. They said they were waiting to trade with the white chief on his return.

"Come over here in the veranda," commanded the American. "I want to tell you fellows something."

To his surprise, not a native so much as stirred. The only effect of his order, for it amounted to nothing less, was to knock the whole band speechless and staring with great luminous black eyes.

The American advanced and seized one of the men, an old Kanaka woodsman, by the arm and started to pull him over into the veranda. The man clapped his hand on the *lava-lava* cloth round his loins. Hunter saw the sinewy fingers closing on the handle of what could only be a *kris*. He was a peaceable enough sort of fellow, yet ready to fight to the death had the white man dared pull him into that veranda—with those devil-devils on the tabu fence.

"You no Kanaka!" blurted the old savage. "White splirits plen'y like allee-samee white man too much. White splirits no like Kanaka—eat up Kanaka—*kaikai Kanaka*."

This left the American ruminating in the creaking bamboo chair, between long smokes and brief smiles, as he watched the gyrations of the devil-toys out of the corner of his eye. Kedge did not return. Looking beyond the babble of the old man, Hunter began to suspect a deeper meaning.

For this very island paradise—had it not fed and sheltered hosts of happy Kanakas in the days of the old gods and long pig—in the days before the whites came with their strange gods, their rum, their vices and their diseases by way of "civilizing" these innocents to a point where but a handful of doomed souls remained of a race destined to die for the sins of the whites?

ON THE northern cape of the island was the domain of the native king, Moku-Moku. He was an old man of gigantic frame and savage dignity, like most of the Polynesian dynasts of royal stock. He ruled with a hand of iron after the fashion of an old-time despot in the lamented "long-pig" age. His warriors were hale and hearty—many of them tattooed bewitchingly from top to toe—and looked down upon the sickly natives clustering round the settlements of the whites.

Each of the four coral pillars supporting his house stood on the corpse of a prisoner sacrificed to the gods in honor of Moku-Moku's rise to rulership. There were pretenders prowling in the bush, however, who thirsted for his blood. Moku-Moku knew it, and his scheme for defeating assassination might be termed a stroke of genius. Instead of trusting to warriors, he had surrounded himself with a harem of a hundred amazons and made them responsible for his life. To prevent conspiracies, he kept these women in a perpetual state of mutual jealousy by denying them the right to hold property of any kind except as donated by himself. This edict quite naturally made the amazons aspire for royal favor, which he, in turn, disposed as he saw fit, to maintain the jealousy-factor on which his life and his kingdom depended. The slightest symptom of treachery would be at once reported by a rival, who thus advanced a step in court favor, richer by several sticks of trade tobacco, over the corpse of the would-be conspirator.

Moku-Moku had news of Vaima's coming fully an hour's run before the young Marquesan princess appeared in the ruddy flare of waning sunset. She remained standing until the amazons had made a circle round the king. Then she announced her offer of marriage from the white chief. Moku-Moku's dusky tattooed features were a study in aboriginal sagacity as he pondered the issue while torches of *kukui* were being lit round the camp. Not in favor of a white spouse for Vaima, still Moku-Moku would not willingly offend the whites by a refusal, especially at that time. For in order to realize the great plan in the back of his head, it was desirable that the whites should not be stirred up from their trade slumber on the shore of the lagoon.

At length the astute old savage accredited himself diplomatically. Maratomtom, the morning star, was to be the judge. If, at the break of dawn, the jungle pigeons should fly low under the star, Vaima had better not marry; should the pigeons fly high, however, and soar toward the great star, Vaima would have royal sanction to the marriage.

That evening, Moku-Moku sat under the candlenut tree resting his damascened chin on a mace of ironwood. He did not appear to notice the dancers. His thoughts were far away on political trails. But when the drums began to throb and the sweet, full-throated Kanaka chants fell in a chorus from lips stained with betel and flashing with ivory smiles, Moku-Moku began to croak in an undertone, tapping the measure on his club of ironwood. Suddenly, with a peal of satanic laughter, the old man sprang to his feet and called for the *huku-huku*, the forbidden dance of "long-pig" tabu that the missionaries thought they had stamped out long ago. Facing the Southern Cross, which was already pulling out of the gathering dusk, the whole camp was swept into one huge, ecstatic whorl of warlike dance—a veritable whirlpool of writhing, twisting shapes, of flashing teeth and eyes, spinning round a wriggling mass of bronzed human flesh, glistening wet with its own mad pace. The drums could be heard faintly as far as the white settlement by the blue lagoon. That is, a native ear could distinguish the distant throbs from the surge of the sea against the coral barrier.

THE morning following, as Hunter was returning from a plunge in the lagoon, he noticed that the natives, in passing, gave his store the cold shoulder and went on to Kedge & Company to do their trading. This sudden affront gave the American something to speculate about besides the affair with Vaima, which he was inclined to look upon as one of several stock jokes perpetrated on the unwary newcomer.

At the same hour, Vaima mounted a fern-clad rock peeking out of a eucalyptus grove. The true dawn was already welling rainbow splendors out of the east. The pale white fires of Maratomtom were rapidly waning in a sky trembling with roseate curtains of light. From her perch on the rock, Vaima saw the great star fading away, as if unmindful of the words spoken by the king, when there was a white flutter over the jungle roof of the High Places. Two mating doves made a sally out of the forest maze, their burnished plumage blazing in the sun as they wheeled and chased each other back under the cool roof of the jungle. Vaima looked into the sky. Maratomtom had been wiped out like a chalk mark on a slate in that brief instant. Still, it was a flight, and it would stand, she knew. But would Moku-Moku, spying with a jealous eye from the cape in the north, consider that the pigeons had made a high flight?

The American was covertly watching Kedge, now returned to his shack, as he was weighing copra on a spider-scale in the shade and trading with the natives in print-cloth, beads and sticks of chewing- and smoking-tobacco. The hybrid had the unconcerned air of a man attending to routine. All that Hunter got out of him by springing the old witch was a peal of laughter.

"What a bally mess!" he croaked. "Stupid of me not to have forewarned you! Part of the ceremony, you know. Nearest kin of the girl always does the 'spook-stunt' at false dawn to frighten evil spirits away from the prospective groom. Too beastly bad that, in this case, the spirits seem to have been frightened *into* the groom!"

Hunter saw that here was a purely tribal custom that Kedge could not have tampered with. In a casual manner, the American managed to smuggle in a word about the cold shoulder given him by the Kanakas, at the same time watching Kedge with stony eye.

The hybrid must have felt the glance resting on him. He became serious at once, or was he merely cleverly shamming?

"Strange—very strange!" he mused at

length, pretending to be mechanically abstracted with his scale. "One can live among these Kanakas very comfortably a long time, and of a sudden one is baffled—you know, taken unawares—mystified."

The malicious leer that underscored the apparently polite rejoinder made the American bristle.

"What do you propose to do about it?" he demanded flatly.

"My dear chap, what can I do?" grinned the hybrid. "Take the advice of a veteran and don't let native ragging get on your nerves. It is bad for the health."

"Exactly what do you mean?"

Kedge gave his monocle a twist and glared. Then he burst into one of his fits of icy laughter, stopping as suddenly as he began. Even as he opened his mouth in reply, the shadow of some one turning the corner of the house reached across the flaring coral sand and halted. Vaima was standing before them. She was plainly hesitating, with a wary glance at the spirit toys on the tabu fence.

Kedge exchanged an I-told-you-so wink with Hunter. The maiden raised her soft dark eyes in dumb submission to the American. As he approached, involuntarily she picked up his hand and laid it against her forehead with both of hers. Kedge, who had read the sign in a twinkle, dryly remarked, "Well, let's dig up a minister" before the baffled American could fathom the meaning of it.

He was still in a state of pleasurable doubt graced by a sort of secret hope that this thing might be real and not sham when he found himself in Sluisser's cabin The big Dutchman was taking his afternoon siesta in ponderous snores while the flies promenaded over his fat, perspiring face. His parasites—an American negro and a Chinese cook—were pressed as witnesses to the ceremony, which Sluisser agreed to perform, between tremendous yawns, as he stretched himself and began to rummage round for his "splicing gear." After grunting and blowing in various corners, and cursing his parasites in seagoing oaths for misplacing things, he came out of the rummage with a dusty, tattered volume, smelling of tar and mold, which proved to be an ancient ship's log dating back to his valiant historic past as pearler and blackbirder. On an almost blank sheet of the old book, tarnished and spotted with age, that still held the closing line of a log-entry in faded ink, the Dutchman started to scribble with a store pencil, inking each word over afterward, as would become a South Seas old-timer. In tortuous Dutch script, the *bêche-de-mer* of his day resolved itself into the following calamity:

> On dis day Sebtemper 17 in yahr of de lort unt Holly Gosht 1919 peered befoe me Vaijma of de bloot of Nukka-Heva de kingk unt Jan Honter of Ammeriky de one mit de odder unt boat togesser I haf dis day put to illegall wet lock not pinding on his bart.
>
> Seigned: KLAAS SLUISSER, Chustice of de Bease, Olliesaenga Savaij.

Vaima signed with a cross. The American, stooping over the paper, raised his head on encountering the words intended for "illegal wedlock" and put down the inked pencil. Kedge filled the hiatus by calmly commenting that contracts with native girls generally read that way. Sluisser's perspiring face was on the verge of purple indignation at the mere suggestion that anything could be amiss with a job that had tasked his brains to the limit. His "Ain't had a diforce yet" started a laugh rippling round the cabin With a stolen glance at Vaima, who remained standing, imperturbably erect as before the altar of her gods, Hunter snapped his jaws together in a flash of sudden resolve, signed his alias to the paper, and the thing was done.

NOT at all done in Vaima's mind, however. With regal dignity she demanded the "book." Sluisser, guessing her meaning, laughed and called to the negro to trot out the Bible, a requisition that instantly reduced the darky to apologetic language—the last trade copy of the Holy Book had been used up for lighting fires. A dime novel, fished out of a grimy corner by the Chinaman with some show of toothless pride, was disqualified by the maiden for the not unsound reason that she did not like the looks of the cover, which showed a villain strangling a woman to death in an attic. Surely this could not be the god of the white man that she had heard the missionaries talk about! The bulky catalogue of a mail-order house in San Francisco carried the day, because the cover was a bright, festive red, and the trade-mark thereon was a golden seal showing a young god in a chariot whipping four chargers into a stormy gallop. Vaima was transfixed with joy. Such a god she could understand.

Vaima handed the book reverently to Sluisser. The old blackbirder, emulating a ministerial wheeze, began to spell his way with a dirty thumb through several random specifications enlarging on the merits of kitchen hardware and roller-skates, whereupon he raised his hand, made a huge cross, and pronounced the two man and wife.

Hunter pitched five silver dollars on the table, and Sluisser started to tear the blotted and seared leaf from the ancient log, which he had no sooner done than Vaima snatched it out of his hand. She rolled it into a small tube, and, raising it slowly to her forehead with a reverent gesture, bent low and muttered an incantation to her native gods. With a dexterous motion she hid the paper in her *ridi*, or girdle, beaming on the men as if she had received a gift from heaven.

As THE American took his departure, Vaima followed after in his tracks, island style. Her remarkably erect and graceful bearing was still marked by the air of solemnity she had observed throughout what she believed to be a ceremony of the greatest weight. But no sooner did she feel the cooling fern brake closing round her naked shoulders than she took the lead with a bound, dancing ahead of her man on the trail with the playful abandon of a child. She would allow him to catch up with her only to dart away at the very moment when he, unable to understand, would reach forth to capture her. And thus she frisked about in the jungle maze redolent with tropic fragrance, drilling a way with her young, warm body through copses of eucalyptus and laurel, flipping the big rattling spathes of the plantain trees round his ears.

This appealed to the artist buried in him, and so he played with her in his stolid, casual way, making passes at her and humoring her—she all savage grace and enthusiasm—until the boy in him was coaxed out and he began to play with a vim, losing fully ten years of his life on that short caper through the brush. At last, when he chanced to catch hold of her, it was with a flush of sincere passion that he crushed her against his breast and kissed her. Vaima broke his hold with a muffled cry.

"Why you bite?" she panted, abashed as only a Marquesan maiden can be to whom the kiss as a caress does not exist.

By the time they stepped into the veranda of his house, Hunter's face was beaming for the first time in many, many years. Could this really be love, he murmured, or just the passion of the flesh, just another jungle adventure?

Vaima's eyes were wandering over bales and goods in the trading-room with the expression of one who is face to face with undreamed-of wealth. The American motioned her to take what she liked. After trying several strings of Chinese glass beads against her tawny skin, with an ecstatic smile the Marquesan maiden stopped short, as one remembers a foregone resolve, and the smile faded. Her mind went back to the scene when the three white men were taking her measure following Kedge's brutal suggestion of marriage. For in that moment Vaima's soul had traveled the long way back to royal-ancestor spirits with whom she made a silent pact that, if she married, she would enlist the power of the white chief to oust the bad white men and restore the land to the natives and their ancient ways. This is what Hunter gathered as he listened to her piecemeal efforts at *bêche-de-mer* English. Then, as if the whole thing might be considered settled, the bride went into the tiny kitchen and began to busy herself with the cooking, lighting a fire, Island fashion, alongside the stove, the purpose of which did not occur to her.

Hunter merely smiled, but it was not the care-free smile of his entrance. He began to fill his pipe in a sort of trance, gazing every now and then abstractedly out of the little window near which he was standing. Soon the fact was borne in on his mind that the fern brakes opposite seemed alive with the bronzed bodies of Kanakas. Not a man moved. They sat in abject silence to a man, staring at his house with glowering faces. Here was another mystery. He called his young bride to the window—could she explain? Vaima stared a while, smiled ambiguously, he thought, and went about making *poi*. Some of the natives were fingering trade goods, undoubtedly bartered by Kedge & Company, while he, the newcomer, was being boycotted. The

American promised himself that he would get even once and for all.

IN THE morning, sometime after the bathing-hour, as Hunter was smoking in the veranda, the natives began to gather again in the brakes. He made up his mind to pay no attention and bide his time. From his lounge at the vine-clad rail he could keep an eye on the band and at the same time study Vaima as she went about her housework. There seemed to be no signals of any kind. Surely, his little bride was not implicated, and under this soothing impression the white man was dozing off when the quick patter of naked feet at his elbow made him sit bolt upright. It was Vaima, now for the first time excited as she pointed out a Kanaka who had joined the crowd opposite. This man was a strapping fellow with a human skull fastened upon his breast. The others seemed to pay deference to him.

"Well, when do we go to war?" growled the American.

"No fight," assured Vaima, and, pointing at the skull-bearing brave, continued: "King him send man with head. King him angry with Vaima, mebbee. King him mebbee see no high-fly pigeon." Whereupon she confessed the nature of Moku-Moku's poetic decision. "Vaima take trail to king plen'y quick," she persisted.

"Not on your life!" bristled Hunter. "How do you know this man is from the king?"

"Yes, yes!" answered Vaima. "King's man always two heads—one live, one dead."

"All right; I'll call the fellow over here, then. It is easier to fight one man than a whole bunch."

"No fight," persisted Vaima. "He no come—king man he wait—he no come—house tabu."

This was a trifle too much for Hunter. There were no spirit-chasers in his veranda, so whence the tabu? And how and by what agency did Vaima know that his house was declared tabu? Hunter's mettle was keyed to the breaking-strain as he dashed across the warm white-spathe coral sand toward the man with the skull. The natives melted away in the brakes, but the royal skull-bearer stood his ground and smiled. What the two men talked about could not be heard, but it was interesting to watch the features of the bronzed warrior changing from good-natured greeting to surprise, only to darken with apprehension, and then, as if suddenly seeing a light, beaming with a mighty grin as he shouted "*Oau-oau!*" and, with a bound, disappeared in the bush. The American said nothing on returning to the house, though he felt well enough the glance of mingled curiosity and admiration that his bride bestowed on him.

That evening, Vaima served her first "real" dinner in Marquesan style—the famous *fai-kai* of her race—consisting of breadfruit broiled over slow, aromatic fires, served with a dip-gravy of coco-milk and yams. They ate in silence from the cool, clean leaves of the pandamus, and slaked their thirst in freshly made *kava*. Afterward, Vaima put the remnants of foods outside on the stoop, to appease the spirit of the night, Vaijnahá.

The natives were in the brakes again at dawn, watching the tabu house as Hunter stepped out dressed for the jungle and armed. Ignoring the watch, he struck trail for the patch where he had first chanced upon the "toddy" cutters. The men were moving to another patch as he caught up, but as soon as they spied him they disappeared in the jungle as by signal. The tabu was, then, not merely confined to his house but attached to his person as well.

The American made straight tracks for Kedge's house, but before he was halfway he caught sight of Sluisser's Chinaman, who came from the lagoon dragging a large albacore. The coolie told him that Kedge had left for the Forbidden Heights the day before, and no one could tell when he would be back. So Hunter went on alone.

It was nearing high noon before the American had tunneled his way through a maze of vines and creepers to the heart of the Forbidden Heights. The jungle roof was so dense that the glaring sunshine overhead was hardly realized. A sort of dull-amber twilight ruled. The solitude was almost stifling. Hunter, squatting for a brief rest on a dead log streaked with moss, could hear the beat of his own pulse. He consulted his compass and was about to make for what looked like a clearing due ahead when he heard a very peculiar noise. It was difficult to tell whence it came.

Presently it was repeated. It sounded like the falsetto whimper of a small dog, and then, again, it sounded more like a stifled moan, but faint and far away. Hunter summoned all the instinct he could command as one who was not entirely unbroken to woodcraft. Even as he began to move he heard, or thought he did, a chilling rattle directly overhead. He peered up under the dim roof of the jungle in vain.

"*Cock-cri-coo!*" The call came with dreadful distinctness from the clearing. The two first syllables were crisply and almost audaciously uttered, only to drop to a hooting drone on the final. It was the closest match to the bold, banal scream of the hornbill Hunter ever cared to hear. He made the clearing with his nerves in his toes. A finger of dazzling sun flared the glade, illuminating the fresh virgin foliage festooned with the crimson jewels of the hibiscus. A flying fox sailed across the finger of fire silently, swiftly. That was all. The silence again became oppressive. That ghoulish call was still ringing in Hunter's ears when he heard a dull thud behind him like a human head striking the ground. He whipped round, only to find himself peering into the dimming brush. He examined the surrounding trees. None was of the coco species at that elevation, but, then, what else but a falling nut could make such a sound? Again the silence closed in.

A slight breeze floated down the shaft of golden fire, stirring the somnolent foliage of the glade with a faint breath of life. Directly ahead, Hunter was sure, came the first pleasing note of the jungle mystery—the faint breath of stringed harmony—as if a bird in its flight had brushed a lyre with the tip of its wing. And even this note, by its sudden contrast, appeared strange and unnatural. He made up his mind to explore one place at a time. The tree facing him was a hoary *ti*, half rotted at the base. As he walked round it nimbly, the crotch of its lower branch made him pause. Something protruded that was angular and did not look like the work of the jungle. Availing himself of the ropes of pendent creepers, Hunter scaled the trunk and gained the branch. There at his feet, fastened with coir fiber, and firmly wedged at an angle in the crotch, was an ancient rusty Chinese harp—the kind that is often seen among lascar crews in the Malay trades. It was evident that a slight stirring of wind would draw more than one tune from the worm-eaten strings of this Æolian puzzle. Hunter bent down and gave it a twang, but even as he touched the rusty strings, the moldy curio collapsed and fell apart.

FROM his perch on the branch, the American commanded a new angle of vision. The branch overhead was loaded down with a queer collection of Sicilian ocarinas, the terra-cotta sort, mixed with mouth-harps and whistles of every sort, likewise rusted and stained to a crisp. These, too, would respond to the breeze and drool out mystery. Hunter reached up with the barrel of his pistol and knocked the pests down. A venerable breadfruit tree proved a veritable exhibit of rusted old hardware junk, ukuleles and dangling broken cow-bells—anything to make a sinister racket.

On the branch of another tree, so placed that a breeze would bang it against the trunk, was a cleverly hung cluster of cracked Chinese gongs, green and black with jungle moisture. The full chorus of these combined noise-makers, given a fair breeze in the dead of night, was more than ample, Hunter perceived, to establish in the mind of the natives an abiding fear in the man-eating white devil-devils of the Forbidden Heights. He also perceived Kedge in the rôle of tabu-master and sole monarch of the domain.

In making his way out of the maze Hunter forgot to look at his compass, and suddenly found himself confronting an old-time Samoan *manuop*, or sacrificial altar. It was a very large terrace of flat stones heaped to the height of a man's chin, studded round the edges with a double border of human skulls. The top of the gruesome table was alive with a feathery group of devil-devil toys, very similar to the spirit-chasers on Kedge's veranda, only larger, and skulls were heaped at their base. A clearing tapered from the altar into a small cove at the foot of the hill. A cargo of dried copra was here, stacked under a rough shed of plantain leaves, evidently waiting a taker from the sea. Unable to get native labor to enter the tabu, Kedge was undoubtedly leagued with crooked skippers to work their crews in the patch and share his copra spoils.

In picking his step back out of the jungle bush the American stopped now and then to listen, knowing that there the ear is a better guide than the eye. He was no longer distracted by the distantly audible jangle of the gongs hanging in the old breadfruit, but there were times when he fancied he was being followed. There could only be one man besides himself in that jungle, and he knew who he was.

"*Cock-cri-coo-oo-oo!*" Again that ghoulish call broke the spell of deadly silence, but in a fiendish pianissimo, like a distant echo of the first brazen whoop. Hunter felt the goose-flesh stirring on his back as he stared into the penumbra of purpling shadow that brooded over the bush. Hornbills did not nest in the Samoas, he knew. None of the instruments he had discovered could possibly produce the ghastly hoot. Again he had the sensation of some one creeping up on him—or could it be an animal gliding through the underbrush?

The American veered slowly round and fastened his gaze upon the very spot in the somber ground-shadows from which something moved toward him with a stealthy glide that might fool the keenest ear. With his pistol pointed at the spot, Hunter now perceived a faint stir in the foliage—then silence. Another stir, somewhat nearer; again silence. Then a soft, gliding motion smothered in the immensity of eternal silence. A dry stick snapped—a tiny crack—with the startling effect of a rifle-shot. And as Hunter's muscles and nerves focused to his gun arm, he now saw, rising behind a screen of dim amber forest light, the outline of a human form stepping with the menace of a shadow. A spurt of bruised flame crashed from Hunter's hand, when out of the swaying shadow, upon the thick fern-swept carpet of the jungle, rolled the golden body of Vaima!

Hunter had killed three men in his life to save his own, and with no pricking of conscience. Here he went down in a heap, accusing himself as a murderer. Even as he crawled toward the girl and saw the blood trickle over the glistening skin from under a mane of blue-black hair, and realized with a pang of hope that she might be only wounded, he vowed never again to bear arms against a fellow mortal. The bullet had broken the collarbone and passed out. He stanched the flow of blood the best he could, tearing his shirt into bandages and applying aromatic leaves between. He forced his flask of rum to Vaima's lips and made her swallow. From a bulge in her *ridi* he uncovered a *kris*, some spirit-charms and breadfruit dried for traveling. These little telltale items enabled him to divine the reason why she had followed him into the haunted maze, where the boldest warriors of the tribe feared to step. And as he realized her one and only motive, he began to feel what the pure primeval love of a savage maiden means.

HUNTER made his way out of the jungle steadying the almost fainting girl with his arm round her waist, as he found he could not carry her on his back without hurting the wound, which had already attracted a swarm of *nono* gnats. She directed him with unfailing native orientation until the brooding amber shadows of the jungle lay behind, and they floundered, dazed and blinking, in the vivid green of feathery fern brakes flecked with golden sunlight. One effort more and they stood on a small naze. The great Pacific rolled at their feet. They breathed once more the briny air with relish. A whale-boat, rowed by Kanakas and steered by a white man, was bobbing upon the gleaming barrels of the waves as it made for the inlet of the white barrier-reef. Under a clump of *puraos* that mirrored waving crowns in the still blue of the lagoon sat a man who seemed to watch the incoming boat. Though his back was turned, the two lovers guessed his identity. Nor did he face about when presently their shadows lay upon the white sand in front of him.

"Well, how's hunting in the High Places?" began Hunter, in a voice fairly well controlled, with a look at the rifle resting on the knees of the man.

"Oh, about as good as your trading, I fancy," came the taunting rejoinder. Kedge continued to stare at the boat, now dashing through the gap.

There was an ominous moment of silence. Hunter nodded to Vaima, who stepped into the lagoon and bathed her wound.

"Look here!" Kedge felt the hard tap of Hunter's knuckles on his shoulder. "Is there any way that Kedge & Company can explain the tabu declared on my house and person?"

The hybrid's face seemed to blanch behind the tan.

"Why, man," he snapped, in the tone of an adult correcting a child, "I told you once before that one may live among these Kanakas for ages and still learn something new——"

"Such, for instance, in the line of 'something new,'" Hunter warned, "as tabu altars heaped with the skulls of murdered natives, not to mention little things like trees that talk and sing the white devils' message."

Which brought Kedge to his feet hissing an oath, for not only had he been taken coldly unaware but the barrel of the rifle slipped through his fingers in rising. The rough-shod foot of the American was on the stock.

"Kedge, if I could only hate you as much as I once admired you, there would be at least one white corpse on this island before sundown."

The hybrid, who had present use for composure, was fishing his monocle out of the sand as he retorted,

"Have no fear, Mr. Hunter; you will soon learn to hate me as you hate yourself."

The American would have cut down his enemy in another instant had not Vaima, dripping with diamond drops, interposed. The fighting instinct receded in favor of a finer and nobler one as Hunter laid an arm round the waist of his bride.

"I hate myself no more," he said, with simple pride underlying the great emotion that was now at work building up the man in him.

The prow of the whale-boat, shearing through a fringe of lotus lilies, nosed up on the beach of the lagoon. Its commander, a portly, hearty-looking man in white drill and pith helmet, proved to be the bishop of the Savaiian diocese. Kedge extracted a greeting and a parcel of San Francisco newspapers from the clergyman. He proceeded to pour out Island news when the American stepped up, and, ignoring the hybrid, extended a hand in greeting toward the divine that was strangely in contrast with the tone of command which crept into his voice.

"Your reverence, in these islands all white men belong to the same club. I am Hunter, of New York, but whoever you are, I want you to drop everything and go with me to my cabin *at once.*"

There was a cold glint of suspicion in Kedge's eyes as the bishop complied without a word and went along, becoming instantly solicitous when he perceived Vaima's wound. The hybrid made slowly for Sluisser's cabin, where he bribed the negro to run over and watch Hunter's place.

THE American had quite a trying time to make his savage bride turn over the faked marriage paper, which she regarded as a celestial talisman. The bishop read the scrawl as unemotionally as if it had been a newspaper advertisement.

"It is not the first paper of this sort I have seen," he explained.

Hunter now spoke up; the man in him looming large.

"Your reverence, I want you to give me the *real* thing—right on the spot." He scattered a few silver dollars on the table. "All I've left."

The clergyman's round blue eyes swept Hunter's blazing face and the tawny form of Vaima as she drooped on a stool, weak and pale from the loss of blood. A benign smile spread over his countenance as he uttered—emphasizing every word—a sentence that Hunter remembered all his days:

"You are the first white man in these isles to act white in a case such as this."

All of which meant a cool nothing to the Marquesan maiden, for, when the bishop, after writing a proper contract with his fountain pen on the back of Hunter's soiled passport, asked her to sign, she still stuck to her paper with the simple faith of the born believer. The husband's gentle remonstrances encountered the gentle insistence of a faith that was so hard to break, because, once broken, it might never be restored. The bishop, seeing the danger, motioned the husband aside and put the matter thus:

"Fat white chief plenty too much gin. Maka mistaka, savvy? Him put wrong devil-devil into paper—plenty too much gin. Him put wrong spirit in book—plenty more too much gin, savvy?" Here the bishop produced a pocket copy of the Holy Bible with a silver cross on the velvet cover. "This good-fellah book," he persisted, "plenty good white-man spirit—no devil-devil this book—maka you plenty happy too much, savvy?"

This preachment, backed up by the cross on the velvet cover—and what savage can resist the glossy touch of velvet?—began to work on the untutored instinct of the savage girl, who was now plainly at the end of her strength. In reaching for the rum-flask, Hunter chanced to glance at the window, where a black face, pressed flat against the pane, ducked out of sight. With a bound he was out in the veranda, grabbed the spy and yanked him into the house.

"Here, sign this paper as a witness," commanded Hunter, "and this time you sign your honest-to-goodness name, the same as I shall write my *right* name, or there'll be a sick nigger yelling murder round here in about two seconds."

Sluisser's darky was glad to get off so easily and signed himself no less than "George Washington Jones," swearing this to be true under the searching glance of Hunter, who proved to be Basil Spender Townsend. As he knelt down on the floor beside the weakened girl and the bishop began to read from the Holy Book, the door was slowly opened as by some invisible hand. The crumbled paper of the mock ceremony traveled across the floor in the breeze, faltering a moment at the threshold, and blew away. With it broke the last bond that for so long had held the white man a slave to his own misery. The bishop pronounced the benediction over two crouching figures—one of which was drooping forward in a faint.

THE first night of the full moon, Moku-Moku gathered his court of amazons under the sacred *moto* tree that marked the last step on the path to the Forbidden Heights. The white chief had kept the pact made in the fern brakes with the skull-bearing emissary. A small heavy chest painted a bright red was at his feet, and a thin corded wire ran direct to the great altar of the white devil-devils. Distantly through the groves of many trails could be heard the weird throb of war-drums beaten by hands that waxed ever more fervent. The whole tribe was rising as one man—as a man rising from his grave—for in that hour the die would be cast to show whether the island belonged to the white devil-devils or to its native sons. In little bands they trickled out of the bush, armed to the teeth with gleaming spears and oiled clubs of iron-wood. The cavities of their luminous eyes were painted blue with the soot of the candlenut—the forbidden badge of death that no native had dared assume for a generation. Hunter noticed the sign but did not understand. Nor could he guess why Vaima dropped on her knees and began to pray in the Marquesan tongue to the god of the great *tiki* in the little red box.

Of a sudden, the drums stopped. Fully a thousand warriors stood in the forest fringe like gleaming statues of bronze, but not a sound was heard. The great disk was already silvering the fronds of the *moto* tree. In another instant it would be directly above its sacred trunk. Hunter faced about and raised his hand to Moku-Moku, who broke the silence with a husky "*Oau!*" The warriors took up the cry, and a dull murmur rolled out of the jungle. Hunter bent over the red chest, grasped a handle and pressed it down.

A mighty blast of flame spurted from the Forbidden Heights. The Kanakas saw with their own eyes great writhing spirals of devil-cloud whirl out of the blaze, contorting themselves into terribly evil features leering and spouting livid fire. Then came the crash, shaking the rock on which a thousand warriors stood spellbound with awe—a crash that thundered down the island valleys with the shock of a heavy barrage.

From that moment there was a white king on the isle of Oloesanga, for had he not wrested the land from the mighty tabu devils with a single motion of his hand? Had he not restored the land of the Forbidden Heights to the children of the soil? Had he not accomplished at one stroke what Moku-Moku's thousand bronzed giants would never have dared attempt?

Of Kedge, no trace was ever found. He seemed to have disappeared as mysteriously as he had come to the island in years gone by, and with his going vanished that dreadful lament of the tabu solitude, the "*Cock-cri-coo.*" Whereas Hunter, who had never been able to hold down what they call a job in the big cities of the whites, took very nicely to rulership as befitting one legally joined to a maiden of royal race. He was still there, at last accounts, but if you should ever wish to search him out, don't inquire for "Hunter" or "Townsend."

"Hondah," they call him.

By the Author of "The Day of Atonement"

Lizette

Mr. Raphaelson Could Not Be the Artist That His First Story in Everybody's Showed Him if He Couldn't Do Something Different. He Has Done It Superbly in This Charming Characterization of a College Girl

By Sampson Raphaelson

Illustrations by Douglas Duer

IT WAS at the Junior prom that Chuck Anderson first met Lizette. She ran her fingers through his sleek hair and examined them with amazement.

"My God! No vaseline!" She rose on her toes and smelled of his hair. "And no toilet-water! My dear, you're the real thing! Don't tell me you're from some hick town in this state!"

"Carrolton, Illinois." Chuck smiled.

"My God!" Lizette repeated devoutly.

Lizette could "get by" with such bald reference to the Deity, for she always managed to have her Madonna expression when she made them. Her shanty-Irish expression she reserved, for moments in which she quoted from Oscar Wilde's "Reading Gaol," or Kipling's "Vampire," which, on occasion, she spoke of as her favorites, and which must have been, for they were the only poems she knew.

"My God!" she repeated, and stepped back to regard Chuck intently. "Athletics?" she shot at him.

"No."

"Literature?"

"Associate editor of the *Monthly*," he confessed, almost blushing.

"But why the chin?"

"What chin?"

"This chin—your chin." Her slim fingers touched Chuck's rather square, subtly modeled chin.

"Signifies determination," he told her. "I make it a rule with all the homely girls I take out to kiss 'em good-night."

"Take *me* out," Lizette said eagerly. "I'm beautiful. There are no new ways of kissing, anyway," she added sadly.

Chuck looked at her in amazement. From her face his eyes went down to her figure, slim, not short and not tall, shoulders rising from the tightly fitting black-velvet dress daintily as in a nine-year-old girl arrayed for the ballet. And then again to her face, childlike and round, with full, mobile lips delicately turned, and eyes a bit deep-set, large, blue-black—eyes indubitably naive, yet with great possibilities for subtlety. She was smiling at him curiously.

"Look here," Chuck said, in a flash of intuition; "I don't believe you know anything about kissing."

"I don't," she confessed. "The third time I was kissed—the first two times don't count—I was sixteen, and we thought we were engaged—boarding-school and military-academy stuff; but I was kicked out of boarding-school, and he thought that was the signal for a long one——"

"A long what?"

"Kiss, my boy. So I slapped him into a wrinkled rug. Ever since, I've had that slapping-look for slickers. You know—" She stood off melodramatically and recited in a deep, vibrant voice, "Scoundrel, place

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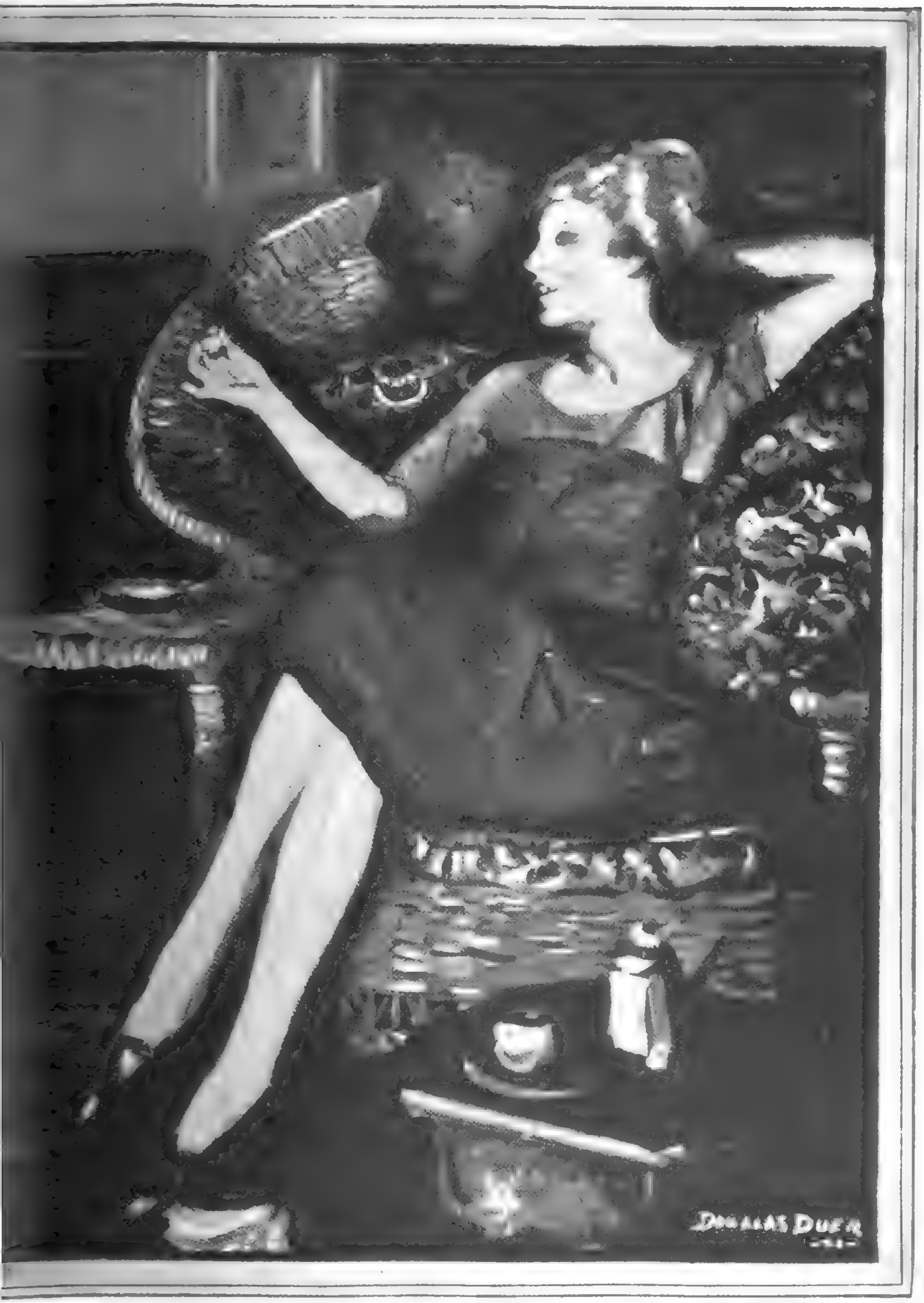
They were both laughing softly as Lizette puffed away on her cigarette.


DOUGLAS DUER

d they didn't hear the light patter of bedroom slippers on the stairs.

your filthy paws on me once moh, and I'll k-hill yuh!"

"What were you kicked out for?"

"Washing a girl's back after hours—Listen — there's Agnes Crumm coming in with her football hero. Let's step out of this booth and dance."

Chuck noted her manner as they emerged from the holly-hung, latticed booth and passed the couple going in. It was sedate, poised, sweetly girlish.

"H'lo, Agnes!"

"H'lo, Lizette! Isn't it a lovely prom?"

"Just adorable, Agnes!"

The genteel intonation seemed to suit her as well as the rather chorus-girl line. She was—why think it, he said to himself as they tilted into the great stirring of couples dancing; why not say it?

"Look here, Lizette—uh—you don't mind my calling you 'Lizette,' do you?"

"I'd knock you for a goal if you didn't. I've had two months of formality and sorority do-as-we-say, and I promised myself to-night that if I met a man who looked sane instead of undergraduate, I'd break loose and throw myself on his mercy."

"And I'm the man? Thanks!"

"Lay off!" Lizette warned him. "That sounds like the beginning of a line."

"Well, look here, Lizette; I've got to place you before this goes much farther. I've a sort of a system about women. I go out with two kinds—the kind I take to proms and fraternity formals—good-looking, swell dressers, darned good dancers. They——"

"They set you off—give you an air of class—*I* know. You hold their hand and say good-night, and then the door slams."

"Exactly. But the other kind wouldn't go out with me again if I merely held her hand."

"Gosh! Don't you ever go out with a girl you can *talk* to?"

Chuck grinned.

"I walk to and from classes with *them*. Now, what I want to know is this: Where do I place you?"

"What you doing Monday at three?" Lizette inquired.

"Nothing."

"Come and walk with me from the Natural History building to Washington Hall. I look like class number one, and I talk like class number two, but Chuck, my boy, I'm class number three first, last and all the time!"

Chuck laughed amicably and gently patted her back. She leaned away, without losing step, to look squarely at him.

"That's a *brotherly* pat," she said.

"Good heavens!" Chuck exclaimed, half amused, half irritated. "Where'd you get all your worldly wisdom?"

"Travel—it broadens one. Never lived in the same town more than six months. Father's dead, and I'm mamma's only child, and mamma decided a long time ago that I know what I want better than she does."

The dance ended. They threaded their way back to the Phi Epsilon booth, where Chuck was to return her to the campus celebrity who was her escort for the evening —president of the Y. M. C. A., 'varsity football, Ku Klux, manager debating team, Phi Epsilon, preliminary honors. Chuck paused just outside the booth.

"About a date—I'm serious. Will you go riding with me some evening this week?"

"Riding? You got a car down here—a Mercer roadster, with steel wheels, gray?"

"Exactly." Chuck's tone was dubious, for he couldn't tell how this strange creature would take him and his car.

"Gosh, Chuckie, how I despise 'em! I'll be darned glad to go with you, though, if you come before dark and take me to dinner. The sisters at the house'll see it all, and they fall hard for that kind of stuff."

"I can't understand *your* caring what the sisters think."

"I'll let you in on that when I see you. Better come Tuesday evening. I'm dated up Wednesday, and I must study Monday and Thursday—house rules. Bring along a book—poetry or something. I want you to talk literature. I'm not going to be a mutt all my life."

"Whose poetry do you like?"

"No choice. If it's good poetry, I don't understand any of it. And say——"

"Yes?"

"When you get home to the frat-house to-night and gather round the fire with the boys, talk about your *own* girl if you have to talk—savvy?"

LIZETTE had just finished a half-hour's process of carefully arranging her thick yellow hair, and now she proceeded carefully to muss it here and there.

Agnes Crumm, a sister Gamma Nu, a senior and president of the sorority, a dark-eyed girl with a small, pouting mouth and nervous hands, was sprawling comfortably on Lizette's bed.

"What's the idea?" she inquired, as Lizette finished the careful mussing.

"Classical carelessness, as my rhet instructor would say. I conform, and then I show my contempt for conformity."

"You're a queer girl, Lizette."

Lizette carefully powdered her nose.

"*I'm* not queer a bit. You are—you and the rest of the sisters—and the girls at this jerk-water university."

"Why, Lizette!" Agnes rose to a sitting posture, shocked.

Lizette's came swifty over to Agnes, affectionately placing her arm about the shoulders of the older girl.

"It's just my silly way, dear. I guess I *am* queer. But I'm down here to learn how other people act and to act like them; so you just tell me right out when I'm not doing the right thing, won't you?"

Agnes regarded her thoughtfully.

"What time is Chuck Anderson coming?"

"He's due now."

"You'll be home by ten-thirty, sure?"

"Oh, sure!"

"You see—" Agnes hesitated.

"Go on. You can't hurt my feelings."

"Well, Chuck is very desirable for dances, dinner-parties at the house here, and so on. He stands high—good family, lots of money. But he's sort of fast—and——"

"I got you. He's a dangerous man in an automobile. I suppose it'd sound queerer than anything if I said that 'dangerous' men are safest when they're safe at all. They don't behave like rotters with regular girls and then kid themselves that they're romantic. Toss me that vanity case—quick! There's Chuck driving up now——"

And Lizette bolted out of the door.

"Ten-thirty!" Agnes called after her.

BEFORE climbing into the glistening gray car, Lizette paused to admire Chuck.

"That's a perfect cap—just slouchy enough. Take it off; let's see your hair. Gosh! How do you do it without brilliantine, Chuckie?"

"Born that way—it's a gift."

"My dear"—climbing in—"you and I are a couple, that's all. What did that tie cost you?"

"Eight dollars."

"I knew it! And that's a million-dollar shirt. And you spent hours picking them out. And then you spent two seconds knotting the tie and made it a point not to look in the mirror—*I* know!"

They dined in the café of the only "first-class" hotel in town. Lizette looked particularly like a lovely child. Her eyes seemed hardly blue at all—they were so deep with swimming shadows. Her cheeks glowed a transparent pink, and her lips were very sweetly curved, and red.

"I'm going to take you out three or four times more," Chuck told her. "Then I'm going to quit—as soon as I can get the flavor of you out of my system. You're the only really nice girl I know—you're the only girl I ever met who makes me feel what the women's magazines say a gentleman ought to feel toward a woman. You're the only kind of a girl I'd want to marry, and I'd be a fine guy for any one like you to be tied to for life. So I'm going to get just enough of you so that the thought of you won't tantalize me too much—if you'll let me hang around, that is."

Lizette was regarding him quite seriously.

"Chuck, after three times you'll know all there is to me. Any regular guy would. And then you won't want to see me any more. Wait a minute—I'm not kidding. I'm different—I know. But I'm not deep. After all, all I've got is a line. I'm sort of wise in a traveling-salesman way, but I've got a flighty brain that hasn't held on to anything long enough to get to the heart of it. That's why I'm here. I want to get something from books and from educated people that'll make me happy *when I'm tired*. Know what I mean? After a dance, for instance—kind of all in. See? The whole world looks sour. I wonder what it's all about. That's why I'm sort of holding in and taking orders from these small-town aristocrats and trying to behave like a sister in a sorority of good standing. If I acted natural, I'd get kicked out of here in a week. And yet I've got to bust out once in a while. I elected you—you don't mind, do you?"

"I love it," Chuck said.

"Did you bring any poetry along?"

"Rupert Brooke and Matthew Arnold."

"'What ho!' cried the king—and who are they?"

"Brooke was an athlete with a young girl's love of beauty, and Matthew Arnold was a fine gentleman in a library. We'll drive a way out into the country and read them in the moonlight."

"Got to get home at ten-thirty, Chuck. House rules."

"Devil with house rules! All the girls break 'em."

"I promised Agnes."

Chuck looked up with a start.

"Agnes Crumm? How did she— Tell me about this; I'm interested."

Lizette rendered her conversation with Agnes. Chuck leaned back thoughtfully, somewhat sardonic.

"Well, that's amusing," he said at last. "So I'm a dangerous man in an automobile! Of course—I suppose I am. But, of all people, Agnes! Listen, Lizette; I don't usually gossip, but—I took Agnes out twice last spring. I had her rated in class number two, and she was. But the second time we went out, I somehow went stale on her, and I talked about the weather, about books, and about my mother—and I politely took her home. I felt from that evening that she'd hate me——"

"Of course she would! Chuck, you should have kissed her in self-protection. No man is proof against the tongue of a woman who had a right to be kissed and wasn't."

"Sometimes," said Chuck slowly, "I think you've been kissed a darned sight more than three times."

"Sometimes I think so myself," Lizette replied reflectively. "I seem to know so much about it—don't I?"

THE gray car purred up Tower Street and wound its way across the campus, whose lamps glowed like golden pearls. Windows were yellow with light. And out of silver mist, black and graceful against the faintly glowing sky, rose the bare branches of poplar and oak and maple and elm.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" said Chuck, easily guiding the swiftly gliding roadster.

"Curses on me artistic ancestry—I'm sniffling again! I always do."

"Sniffling?"

"The scenery. It makes me want to cry. Drive faster, Chuck—that'll jazz me up and make me worry about my hair."

"Why, you lovely child!" said Chuck, and he disobeyed her, slowing down, and recited softly:

"Tenderly, day that I have loved, I close your eyes,
  And smooth your quiet brow and fold your thin dead hands.
The gray veils of the half-light deepen; color dies.
  I bear you, a light burden, to the shrouded sands——"

"Oh, Chuck, that's beautiful!"

"It's Rupert Brooke."

"Is he like that all the way through?"

Chuck paused a moment; then,

"Have you ever felt like crying because you loved some fellow?" he asked her.

"You bet! Bernard Granville—I once saw him in the 'Follies'—he wears evening clothes and does an eccentric dance with *such* a disdainful air. I went home and blubbered."

"Well, Brooke has a poem or two that'll bring back that evening to you."

"Gee!" Lizette sat up. "That's poetry—isn't it—when you cry?"

"Yes, or when you *want* to cry."

"Sure! When you hear a good jazz orchestra, or when it's springtime, or when your mother suddenly quits trying to tell you where to get off at."

They drove on in silence, while the last tinge of day faded, leaving the countryside white under the full moon.

"Chuck!"

"Yes, Lizette?"

"Want to kiss me?"

"Very much."

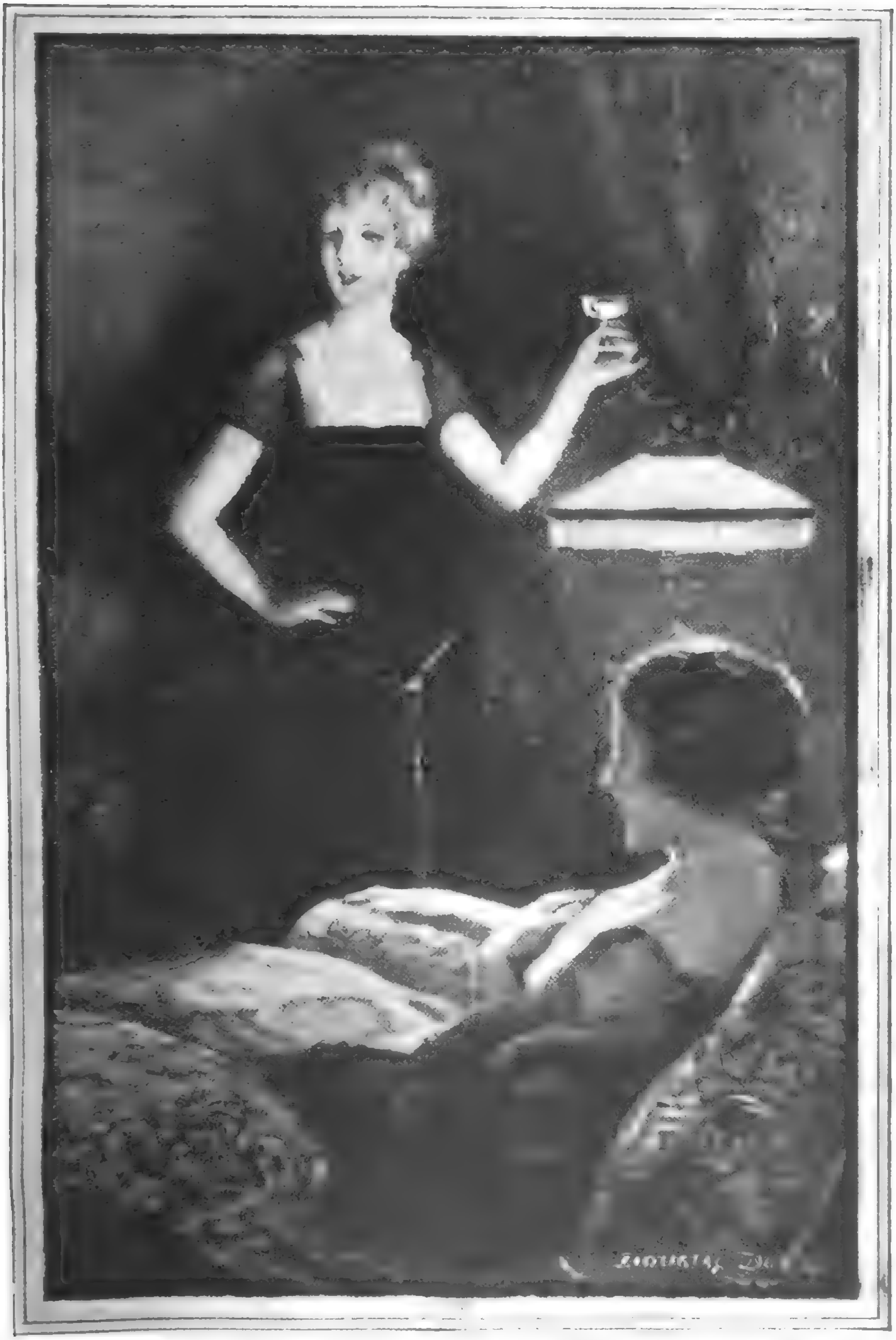
"I want you to, too. But if you tried it, I'd slap you clear out of the car."

Chuck slowed down again.

"I kind of half understand you," he said. "But I'm darned if I can see why you don't do what you *want* to do."

"I was out with a fellow once, driving—in Florida, it was—and he wanted to, and I wanted him to—and he did, and suddenly it became like noon in a quick-lunch restaurant instead of twilight under the palms—see? Oh, look! What's that?"

At a crossroads straight ahead, clear against the moon, rose a two-story shack with a curious towerlike top. In front stood what once must have been a pop and soda-water stand. The whole place was quite evidently deserted.



"You going to *drink* it?" Agnes's voice was hushed, shocked. "'Course I am—soon as Herbert Doolittle comes to make it a party."

"That's the old hoosegow—a notorious place about five years ago. All sorts of booze-parties."

"Let's stop there, Chuck, and sit on the soda-water stand and read poetry."

"Lord, why aren't there any more like you down here? You bet we'll stop there!"

The car, however, stopped about a hundred yards before reaching the hoosegow, and Chuck looked puzzled. He stepped down and examined the tank.

"I guess we'll have to stop *here*," he told Lizette lightly. "At least until some one comes along and lends us gas. I thought I had enough—confound that roommate of mine! I wish he wouldn't use this car without telling me."

LEGS swinging from the soda-water stand, they sat, two inky figures in the October moonlight, Chuck reading Brooke's poems—amorous, spiritual, and gross. He began with "A Channel Passage."

"Gee, I like that, Chuck! Read the first line over. 'The damned ship lurched and slithered.' There's a kick in that."

Then he read her "Desertion." She leaned forward, elbows on knees, head cupped in her hands, absorbed from the first lines.

When he finished, Lizette did not move.

"Like it?"

He leaned over to look into her face. A tear was rolling down her cheek. She sniffled, shook her head violently.

" 'The damned ship lurched and slithered,' " she recited enigmatically. Then: "Rupert Brooke gives me a pain. Read the other guy."

He read her Arnold's "Dover Beach," and she asked him to reread the last lines:

Ah, love, let us be true
  To one another! For the world, which seems
  To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
  Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
  And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and of flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

" 'On a darkling plain,' " she repeated. "That's me. That's you. That's all of us here in this darned Middle West. Only, we don't know it. Oh, there's a car coming, Chuck—better flag it."

She sat and kicked her heels idly while Chuck stood out in the middle of the road awaiting the approaching automobile.

"Bet it's a flivver!" she called.

"Shut up!" Chuck commanded. "It's ten-thirty, and half the profs round here drive flivvers—even the dean of Women has one."

It *was* a flivver, and its occupant not only had heard Lizette but evidently was concerned, for, as the car stopped beside Chuck, a voice—the voice of a female, scratchy, edged, and not at all ingratiating—inquired:

"You are a student? What are you doing out here at this time of the night—with a *girl?*"

Lizette, who had come running over, replied before Chuck could gather himself together:

"That's easy, Auntie. He's here because he's out of gas. And I'm here because I was with him all the time. You don't think he picked me up at the hoosegow, do you?"

"What's your name, young woman?"

Here Chuck intercepted.

"I beg your pardon," he said belligerently, "but what right have you to ask these questions?"

Lizette had moved swiftly to a point where she could catch a glimpse of the woman's face, and now she gasped:

"My God! It's the dean of Women!"

The side door of the flivver swung open, and the tall, gaunt figure of Miss Ophelia Flax stepped ominously into the moonlit road. The figure approached Lizette.

"Any young woman," it stated severely, "who could lose control of herself to such an extent as to use an expression like 'My'—such as you have used, is, in one sense or in another, *loose*."

"Oh, slush!" said Lizette indignantly.

Miss Flax stepped nearer Lizette.

"*What* did you say?"

Lizette was contemptuously silent.

"I *think* she said, 'Oh, slush!' " Chuck told her obligingly.

"What's *your* name?"

"Charles Anderson."

"Mm-hm." Miss Flax's lips tightened. "You're the young man who wrote an article on the university administration in the last issue of the student monthly."

"Yes, Miss Flax," said Chuck agreeably. "And you may be interested to know that

I'm writing another for the next issue."

"And what's this young woman's name?"

"My name's Lizette Huxley, and I'm a freshman Gamma Nu."

"Well, Miss Huxley, since it's after hours, you will kindly ride home with me."

"I'll be darned if I will!" responded Lizette heroically. "We came out here to read poetry, and the car went out of gas, and I guess I'm enough of a sport to stick by the old boat."

For a tense moment, Miss Flax glared from Lizette to Chuck and from Chuck to Lizette. At her next move, both young people stepped back, startled.

With one sharp, zigzag gesture, she tore off her coat and stood revealed in a white, high-collared shirt-waist. Then she dived into the tonneau of the flivver, from which she emerged with a tin pail, which she swung to the front of her little car. There she knelt on her coat and went on all fours under the motor, opened the pet-cock at the carbureter, and drained about two gallons of gasoline into the pail. She emerged, face, hands and shirt-waist smudged with oil and dirt, set the pail before Chuck, went through another series of geometrical gestures in donning her coat, catapulted into the flivver and drove off.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" said Chuck softly. "The old girl is human!"

"'The damned ship lurched and slithered,'" sang Lizette, watching the departing flivver, and giggled hysterically.

They climbed thoughtfully into Chuck's roadster and drove for a while in silence. Then Chuck felt Lizette's head on his shoulder. She was crying softly.

"I've messed everything for you. Oh, how I've messed it all!"

Chuck put an arm round her and patted her shoulder, and she smiled up at him.

"You haven't messed a thing for *me*," he told her. "I wouldn't have missed this—and you—for anything. I've learned an awful lot about honesty—and courage. It's you I'm worrying about. Next meeting of the Council of Administration you may be expelled."

"I—I guess I'm all wrong," Lizette sighed. "But, Chuck, she—Ophelia—and the rest of 'em—Agnes and all the virtuous maidens who kiss only fellows of good social standing—*they* can't be all *right!* Gee, it's a complicated world!"

Chuck paused in profound thought.

"It *is* complicated," he offered judiciously. "But the worst part of it all is dried-up, unhappy people, like Ophelia. I'm going to write a wicked essay on it for the monthly if it's the last thing I do. I've a peach of an idea already. Going to write it to-night."

"Tell me about it."

"Can't. Have to write it."

"Write it at our house. I've broken all the ten commandments already. Sitting in the parlor with you at midnight can't do me any further harm."

WITH a pad of paper in his lap, sitting in the big davenport by the fireplace in the Gamma Nu living-room, Lizette excitedly at his side, Chuck slowly wrote the title of his essay: "Thoughts on the Ideal Dean of Women."

Then he proceeded:

> The ideal dean of Women should have faith and shrewdness, not sanctimoniousness and suspicion. She should be wise, not incredulous, sensitive to the woes of others, not thin-skinned about her own. She should pity pretty girls, not hate them. She should not try to stifle Youth's amorous inclinations; rather should she attempt to raise them to the level of romance. She should be able to understand how a girl with a pretty leg may have an innocent pleasure in showing it. At some time in her life she should have felt the exquisite pleasure of dancing, that she might be able to distinguish it from lust. She should have been in love, preferably more than once. She should have had or wanted to have a baby. She ought to operate always on the hypothesis that young men wish to be celebrated and young women wish to be loved. If girls lie to her, she should blame herself, not them.

Lizette had followed every word intently. When it was finished, she eagerly reread it.

"Gee, that's a mean one, Chuck!" she said, with admiration. "I love it." She read aloud: "'She should be able to understand how a girl with a pretty leg may have an innocent pleasure in showing it.' How did you know that, Chuck?" She rose and pirouetted about the room. "Gee, I feel wicked! I'd like to have a part in a show where I could be a vamp—short skirts, red rose in my hair, smoking a cigarette, feet on the table—silver-buckled pumps and striped silk stockings—like this!"

She sank into a thick-armed leather chair, raised her legs to a table and demanded a cigarette imperiously.

"Sylvester, you weary me! Vice has

lost its glitter. Even absinthe high-balls no longer make me blood riot. Light this cigarette, Sylvester, and leave me to me dreams."

They were both laughing softly as Lizette puffed away on her cigarette, and they didn't hear the light patter of bedroom slippers on the stairs; and it was not until Agnes Crumm, hastily clothed, her hair in a knot, appeared at the foot of the stairs that they looked up.

There was a soul-searing silence. Then,

"Hadn't you better go up-stairs?" Agnes inquired in chill tones.

Lizette hesitated; then,

"I will," she replied, "when Chuck and I have finished talking."

"In that case," said Agnes, "I shall have to ask Mrs. Stubbins to come down and keep you company."

Chuck reached for his coat and hat and came to Lizette, who rose.

"I think I'll say good-night," he said gently.

"Good-night, Chuckie dear." Lizette rose on her toes and kissed him sweetly; then she passed Agnes and ran lightly up the stairs.

Chuck called Lizette on the telephone late the next morning.

"Sleep well?"

"Like a top! If every criminal feels like me—a sort of well-thank-God-I-did-my-darndest feeling—then me for a life of crime! It's like getting out of a corset."

"How are the sisters treating you?"

"They don't know anything—yet. Agnes made a bee-line for Mrs. Stubbins' room, and I guess the two of 'em 'll chew the rag for a day or two. Problem: Will it hurt the sorority reputation worse to have me expelled, or can they keep me and tame me? Agnes is no foolisher than a fox; so I guess she won't say anything—for a while, at least."

"I've been up most of the night worrying about it, Lizette. I——"

"Why, Chuckie, you're noble! You're the salt——"

"Lizette! If you're going to make fun of me——"

"Chuck! That's just my tank-town way of saying I'm crazy about you."

"Well, I decided to see Ophelia to-day, and explain as well as I could about your being late, and apologize for the way we talked to her. But they told me at her office that she left on the midnight train last night for Detroit. The convention of the Amalgamated Flat-chested Virgins or something—and that she won't be back until late Friday. You're safe until then and I'll see Ophelia Saturday morning first thing. You sure Agnes will hold it?"

"Sure! She hates me for cramping her style with men, but she's a crafty worker. Chuck, you're spoiling it all, though I was having such a good time being an outcast!"

"Listen! Our fraternity-house dance is Friday night. Break your date and come with me?"

"Easy— Gee, I'm a viper, thinking of myself all the time! Aren't *you* going to get kicked out, too? If I come to the dance with you, won't that just about settle your hash?"

"I wish it would, Lizette. I'd feel better. As it is, the dean of Men and I get on like brothers. He knows lots more than what's in 'Pilgrim's Progress.' *He'll* understand—and that's another reason why I want you to come. He and his wife 'll be among the chaperons, and I want him to meet you. He'll get your number faster than most people, and it'll help with Ophelia."

"All right." Lizette sighed regretfully. "But, gosh, it feels nice to be a little lost sister!"

WALLIE STEVADOR, a brother of Chuck's in Phi Epsilon, was to take Agnes Crumm to their fraternity formal, so the two young men called together for the two girls in a closed taxi-cab. Lizette was silent and nervous on the way up. Under cover of Wallie's small talk, Chuck asked her what was the matter.

"This week is driving me crazy," she said. "I wish something would *happen*."

"Just forget it," Chuck said soothingly. "Just make up your mind to have a good time."

"Oh, slush!" said Lizette fretfully. "You talk like mother."

Chuck maintained an offended silence, and Lizette leaned back sulkily in her corner. Agnes, sensing something of the situation, rose, as one does from a strengthened sense of righteousness, into the divine regions of gaiety.

Chuck caught snatches of her low-voiced, crooning talk with Wallie.

"Had an *awful* headache to-day—was on the point of calling it off—but I'm feeling fine no-o-ow."

"Glad to hear it."

"*Are* you?"

"You bet I ay-am!"

"Hon-est?"

"Cross my heart and hope to di-ie!"

"I'm *so* glad you're glad."

"I'm so glad you're *glad* I'm glad!"

"Wallie's father," said Chuck, *sotto voce*, to Lizette, "owns half of Kankakee."

Lizette did not reply.

AS SHE stepped into the ladies' cloakroom, the first person Lizette saw was Miss Ophelia Flax. She came out to Chuck, flaming-eyed.

"Why didn't you tell me Ophelia Flax was to be here?"

"Ophelia—here!" Chuck's jaw dropped.

"You— Oh, damn!" Lizette stamped her foot. "Don't you know who the chaperons to your own house dance are?"

Chuck stiffened.

"Look here, Lizette——"

"I want to go home!"

There was silence for a second while they stared disagreeably at one another.

"All right," said Chuck at last. "If you want Agnes—" He paused meaningly.

"I'll show her—and Agnes—and the whole darned bunch!" Lizette said tremulously, and held out her arms for a dance.

After the dance they went into the big living-room, where they sat round the fire with several self-absorbed couples. Lizette's dancing had been correct, but stiff and uninspired. Her demeanor now was the same. A tall youth lounging in the doorway caught her interest.

"That's Herbert Doolittle, isn't it? I want a dance with him."

Chuck stared at her.

"Do you know anything about him at all?" he inquired in a low tone.

"Sure! He's the biggest rounder in college."

"And you want to dance with him?"

"You know it! I'm going to shimmy—right in front of Ophelia."

"I won't do it. Besides, I can't—he hasn't a girl. He's stagging it for the first hour—take care of some chaperons—and then he's going up to his room. I——"

"Has it occurred to you that you might sit out a dance?" Lizette inquired scornfully. "I want a dance with Mr. Doolittle."

"I'm sorry," Chuck's manner was dangerously polite; "but I'm not going to get you a dance with Mr. Doolittle."

"If you don't," said Lizette in a fierce undertone, "I'll walk up and ask him."

The dean of Women was coming in from the other doorway. Chuck rose, his face white.

"I'm going to chat for a while with Miss Flax," he said, with one final, withering look at Lizette. "You may entertain yourself as you please."

Lizette rose promptly and walked smilingly toward the tall, lounging figure.

Chuck shook hands with the dean of Women; his manner was very engaging.

"I wish to thank you, Miss Flax, for your kindness the other night—lending us gasoline, you know—and I want to apologize for several things—explain——"

The thin face of Miss Flax wrinkled into a gracious, modest smile.

"I didn't quite know what to do," she said, with an air of pleasant uncertainty.

Chuck's eyes widened. Her smile was *motherly*. "Good heavens, she's—she's nice!" flashed through his mind, and he grew visibly red as he thought of his essay.

"I was in a hurry to get home," she was saying, "to prepare for a trip to Detroit, and you both behaved so—so queerly—that——"

"So rudely," said Chuck, with sudden generous self-abasement. "I can't really excuse myself, but I should like to explain Miss Huxley. She's different. She's——"

Miss Flax smiled encouragingly.

"I thought Miss Huxley displayed a distinct sense of loyalty and of a certain kind of honest directness—but——"

"She—she's the—the *decentest* girl I ever met!" Chuck blurted. "We were reading poetry——"

"Poetry?"

"Rupert Brooke, and Matthew Arnold."

The dean's brows rose.

"Matthew Arnold!" she murmured. "That's hard to believe."

"Just talk to her once, Miss Flax! Just—" Out of the corner of his eye he saw Lizette and Doolittle walking down the hall to the left, toward the "cozy," a small hidden anteroom where there were easy chairs, a davenport, lamps, books, and a fireplace. He wrenched his mind back and continued talking, probably with smoothness, for he recalled later that the dean seemed to reply quite agreeably in the pauses; but he was half paralyzed with fear for what Lizette might do, and he constantly was shifting his position so that he might keep in sight the slowly moving couple through the swaying, circling figures of the dancers. Thank heaven, they weren't *dancing!* He'd have to get Lizette before she had an opportunity to ruin everything. He'd have to talk to her—talk the shanty-Irish out and the Madonna in—bring her to Miss Flax.

He had been half listening, smiling fixedly, but now Miss Flax's words came with dreadful clearness.

"Not dancing, is she?"

"No; I—I guess she's—she's not."

"Then she must be sitting out. Why not get her and have our little conversation now?"

"Uh—that would be—great!"

Miss Flax rose and looked about the deserted living-room.

"She's not here, and it's too cold for her to be out on the porches," she remarked briskly. "She must be in the small anteroom."

"The small anteroom?" Chuck gulped.

The dean of Women looked at him sharply.

"Of course—to the left of that staircase. I made a tour of the house this evening—I always do—and I discovered it quite by accident. A charming room, isn't it?"

As they moved toward the doorway, Chuck made a second lightning-like revision of his feeling toward Miss Ophelia Flax. She was sinister—a demon. He sought desperately, wildly, for words to detain her. Between the doorway and the staircase he succeeded in killing seven minutes by introducing to her a professor of entomology, a sophomore, a prominent dentist; but then she moved on—benevolently, inexorably.

DOOLITTLE had remarked that he did not care to dance—that he would rather talk.

"For I've heard some interesting things about you."

"What have you heard?" Lizette inquired archly.

"Oh, interesting, daring things."

"What?" she coaxed him.

"Guess I'd better not tell."

"Oh, gosh!" Lizette sighed. "And I'd been hearing that you're the fastest worker with women this tin-horn college has produced. Is that the best you've got?"

Doolittle leaned over, with less of a droop in his eyes.

"I've got a line I learned in New York last summer I think you'll like," he told her. "It's a *tête-à-tête* line. It has to be practised in private. Now, the cozy here——"

He took her arm, leading her to the left, but after a few steps she paused.

"You shimmy?"

In reply, Doolittle grinned; his body sagged slightly to one side, and his shoulders oscillated once or twice. Lizette started to speak, then hesitated, a troubled look on her face.

"Will you go out on the floor and shimmy with me?" she asked slowly.

"Easy! Lots of corners."

"No—in front of Ophelia Flax!"

Doolittle hesitated, then recklessly,

"Guess I will if you will."

Lizette's brow crinkled.

"Darn it; I don't feel like it! I did, five minutes ago, with *her* butting in." She glanced back toward the doorway. Chuck was smiling and apparently absorbed in the conversation of the dean of Women.

Lizette's breath came faster.

"Show *him!*" she said, under her breath. But she made no move.

Doolittle knew how to wait. He studied her, eyes narrowed.

"I know what'll jazz you up," he said suddenly. "Come with me."

He led the way round the corner of the staircase, where he opened a wardrobe door and carefully reached in.

"There's a cocktail in my hand—the real stuff," he whispered. "I'm going to pass it to you, and you beat it into that room. Nobody's there—it's hidden when the door's shut. I'll come right after with another."

A scared look came into Lizette's face. Her hand fluttered to her heart.

Doolittle stood impatiently, his arm in the darkness of the wardrobe.

"Hurry!" he whispered. "Some one's coming." He brought out a thin-stemmed glass, brimming with amber liquor, and held it to her. She took it automatically, not moving, however.

"Beat it—quick!" he jerked at her. "You're safe in the cozy. Be with you in a minute—mix another——"

The tiny, shadowy room seemed empty as she hastily came in through the silently swinging door. She paused for a moment, gazing intently at the golden liquid in the glass, while a pale girl, reclining in a corner chair, stared at her speechlessly. She moved toward a small gate-leg table at the side of the room, unconscious of the girl in the shadowy corner.

"Lizette!"

A low cry—half gasp, half sob—escaped her as she wheeled about.

"Agnes! What you doing here?"

"My headache—Wallie went for bromo-seltzer. What's in that glass?"

Lizette took a deep breath.

"A cocktail."

"A *real* one?"

"Sure!"

"You going to *drink* it?" Agnes's voice was hushed, shocked.

Lizette stared at her scornfully.

"'Course I am—soon as Herbert Doolittle comes to make it a party."

Agnes's eyes almost popped.

"Herbert *Doolittle!*"

Lizette had a wild desire to laugh. She leaned toward Agnes with a confidential air.

"We're going to get drunk together," she said, "and then we're going out on the floor and shimmy."

Agnes did not reply. Music spurted in from the front of the house. Lizette turned away.

Feebly Agnes's voice came.

"I—I'd better go."

"Go ahead! Who's keeping you?"

Agnes did not move, and Lizette gave her one contemptuous glance, flung herself into a sink-down chair, and opened a red-covered book that lay on a table beside the chair. She riffled nervously through the pages and suddenly stopped. A passage had caught her eye, and her expression softened.

WHEN Doolittle stepped quickly and silently into the room, she merely glanced up; then her brows knitted and she bent her head again to the book. Doolittle had paused to take a long draft from a flask, and his spirits were in crescendo. As he stepped toward her, Lizette looked up and inclined her head toward the corner.

"Know Agnes Crumm?"

The glass almost dropped from his hand. For a moment, no one spoke, Lizette scornfully self-possessed, Doolittle livid with sudden fear, and Agnes fidgety and wholly at a loss. None of them saw the silent figures of Miss Ophelia Flax and Chuck in the doorway.

"Better drink your cocktail," Lizette suggested. "Better drink this one, too. I don't know what it'd do to me, and I'm too conservative to find out. Don't stand there like a dumb-bell, desperate Desmond. Drink your drink and sit down. You're not going to teach me to shimmy to-night. It's going to be a nice family party—poetry and everything. If you're Vice and Agnes's Virtue, I guess there isn't much choice between you. Sit down, and listen."

She took up the book and read:

"Her heart is always doing lovely things,
  Filling my wintry mind with simple flowers;
Playing sweet tunes on my untuned strings,
  Delighting all my undelightful hours.

"She plays me like a lute, what tune she will.
  No string in me but trembles at her touch,
Shakes into sacred music, or is still,
  Trembles or stops or swells, her skill is such.

"And in the dusty tavern of my soul,
  Where filthy lusts drink witches' brew for wine,
Her gentle hand still keeps me from the bowl,
  Still keeps me man, saves me from being swine.

"All grace in me, all sweetness in my verse,
  Is hers, is my dear girl's, and only hers."

The two in the doorway had not moved. From where they stood they could see Lizette's profile in the yellow lamplight, her yellow hair massed about her childlike face. Agnes was a blurred blue shadow blending into the angle of arm and back of the brown-tapestried chair. Doolittle loomed within a few feet of them.

Lizette's voice—a contralto full from the throat—had lingered singingly on the last lines, and now there was a silence.

"Guess I'd better find Chuck." Lizette rose wearily.

She swung toward the door, and then she saw Miss Ophelia Flax; but Miss Flax saw her, too, and what Miss Flax saw was the look of a Madonna.

The Man *from* Headquarters

Stories of the United States Secret Service in Russia

The Author, Who Directed Our Secret-Service Division During Those Turbulent Days around Archangel, Had Many Narrow Escapes, Participated in Many Brilliant Exploits. The Best of These Experiences He Has Consented to Relate in Fictional Form for Everybody's

By Hugh S. Martin

Formerly Captain, Intelligence Service, U. S. A.

"THESE white nights may be picturesque and all that, but they are a damned nuisance," mumbled Robert Elmore, as he began pulling down the shades of his apartment to produce a sufficient degree of darkness to render sleep possible.

Elmore, American agent of the Allied Intelligence Section of the Russian General Staff, soldier of fortune and adventurer by profession, had spent the whole day and part of the evening rambling around factories, listening to the wild harangues of Bolshevik street-orators, looking in upon Radical meetings and performing other routine duties.

It was close to midnight when a ring of the door-bell broke in upon his attempt at slumber. Rising, he switched on the lights of his semidarkened bedroom, passed through the library and opened the hall door. In the dim corridor stood a young man of perhaps thirty, visibly in need of a shave, dressed in a shabby gray suit and wearing a soft black hat which drooped somewhat dejectedly over his eyes.

"Zarin!" cried Elmore, grasping an outstretched hand.

"*Tak tochno*," replied the other. He entered the apartment, and Elmore closed the door behind him.

"Well, of all things! Haven't seen you for ages. But, Lord, man, you look like the lost cause! Are you ill?"

"Weary, old man, just weary—and sick at heart," replied the visitor, throwing his hat upon the library table and dropping into a Morris chair. In another moment he had leaned back and closed his eyes.

Knowing the man, Elmore seated himself and waited. What could have brought him here at this hour? Elmore had known Zarin for three years and had been closely associated with him in some of his most important cases—a privilege of which but few could boast, for it was said that not a hundred men in the whole of Russia knew Nikolai Alexandrovitch Zarin by sight.

Suddenly turning in his chair, Zarin broke the silence.

"Got anything to drink?" he asked.

"Almost anything. What would you like?"

"A bit of cognac." Zarin's tone indicated marked depression.

"Right here," said the American, quickly producing a bottle and glasses from a corner cabinet.

After having consumed two generous portions of the stimulant, Zarin sat up straight and lighted a cigarette.

"Sit down, Elmore," he began. "And

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pardon me if I seem to take advantage of your very generous hospitality by burdening you with my personal affairs. The truth is, I feel more thoroughly discouraged to-night than I have ever felt before. It was hard enough when we had only the Germans to fight with, but now, when we face an eruption of Bolshevism—compared with which the Teutonic menace pales into insignificance—and when I behold the weakness of our leaders and the attitude of our people, I am driven almost to the ends of despair. I wonder if you remember my old friend Commander Salov, who was for a time in naval intelligence?"

"Of course I do," Elmore assured him.

"He has been in charge of the submarine school at Cronstadt," said Zarin. "As you know, the demoralization has spread to that place. Salov had more than two hundred students before the revolution. A week ago, when I saw him last, he had fifteen. But, even so, he was hopeful, for they were brilliant—they gave the greatest promise.

"When I saw him last week, it was because I had come upon a trail that led to Cronstadt—that of a German agent, of course. I suspected a man called Dubrovsky—one of Salov's star pupils. I had this much reason—that not many months ago an attempt was made to stab me. It was there, at Cronstadt, and the assassin was a sailor. Salov struck up his hand. I was—and am—sure that he was this same Dubrovsky. But Salov trusted him, and I deferred to his judgment.

"To-night I had a letter from Salov. He was worried by a conversation he had overheard in his school barracks—something hinting at a serious plot. He was, at last, suspicious of Dubrovsky and, for that matter, of all his students. He asked me to go down to help him. But—alas!—even as I was preparing to go, his assistant came to me. Salov had been killed! Murdered!"

"By Jove!" Elmore's eyes grew bright. "That's tough!"

For a moment Zarin was still. Then,

"He was my dearest, my best and closest friend—one of the few I have had for many years," he said slowly.

"Was there any clue?"

"That remains to be seen. Oh, we suspect some things. His body was found in the submarine barracks. All the students have disappeared—of course. It was by Dubrovsky's cot that he was found. And in his hand this paper was clutched."

Zarin handed Elmore a sheet of letter-size paper on which typewritten characters appeared. Elmore took it and read aloud:

> "Arrangements made to ship the fifteen vinegar-casks by way of Archangel about thirty-first. Further instructions will follow."

He stared at Zarin.

"A cipher, of course," he said. "And you——"

A telephone-bell interrupted him. It sounded three times, and Elmore leaped to his feet.

"The office!" he said. "Now—what the devil—at this time of night?"

HIS chief, Colonel Williams, was on the other end of the wire. The colonel had a habit of saying much in a few words. His entire remarks on this occasion were as follows:

"Elmore, you are assigned to X-4 to operate with R-3960, who will personally deliver confirming orders. You will accompany him by to-morrow's train. Take baggage for indefinite absence. Good luck." Elmore heard no more.

But he understood that he had been assigned to duty with the Russian secret service in northern Russia, with headquarters at Archangel. "R" signified "secret agent of the Russian staff." The number "3960" was to be reduced to a smaller denomination by multiplying the first figure by the last two and dividing by the second. Three times sixty was a hundred and eighty; which divided by nine made twenty, and Elmore knew that R-20 was the headquarters code-number of Nikolai Alexandrovitch Zarin, who now sat in his own library smoking a cigarette.

"Up to your old mystifying tricks again, eh?" said Elmore, as soon as his astonishment permitted him to speak. "Explain yourself."

"The explanation is that before I heard of Salov's death, Petroff, at Archangel, had been asking for help. The chief, as you know, doesn't give me direct orders—I have as free a hand as I did before the revolution. But he wanted me to go to Archangel and assist Petroff.

"The situation there is bad. Ships have

been sunk in such a way that the Germans must have known of the time of their sailing. There have been disasters—and stores of explosives have been found—obviously planted for doing more mischief. But until I came upon this scrap of paper in cipher, I was not thinking of going. Yet that cipher is pitifully plain. The fifteen casks of vinegar refer to the submarine students—they are to be sent out from Archangel about the thirty-first.

"Dubrovsky, who probably murdered Salov, is among them. Aside from my duty to Russia and the Allies, I seek my friend's murderer. And I need your help—so I asked your chief to assign you to me."

"Great!" said Elmore.

"Here in Petrograd we are almost helpless," Zarin went on. "The Bolshevist tide is rising. So far they have been beaten—but they will come again, with the German power behind them to help them and finance them. At Archangel there is still some sort of authority.

"There it will be different. Beyond doubt the Germans have been getting news from Archangel to their submarine bases in the White Sea—whether at Vardö or elsewhere. Fifteen ships have been sunk this season. There have been two great explosions, at Bakaritsa and Economia. Only last week Petroff's men found enough high explosives stored in the city to blow it up. Petroff feels that he has failed and must have help. We shall try to give it."

"What's my part?"

Zarin smiled. Here was help after his own heart!

"You will be the new American shipping inspector," said Zarin. "You will spend money like an American millionaire. You will occupy a sumptuous apartment—you will keep open house. All Archangel will flock to your buffet, which will be stocked with the finest liquors. And—we leave tomorrow."

"What will you be doing?"

"Oh, I?" Zarin grinned. "I shall be Nikolai, your butler!"

AT ARCHANGEL, Petroff told them in more detail what Zarin already knew concerning German espionage activities in his district. The tale was bad enough; immense damage had been done, and many lives had been sacrificed. Petroff was in despair; it was easy to see with what relief he welcomed Zarin, most famous of all the old agents of the secret police in the days of the czar.

"You have carried out my suggestions?" asked Zarin.

"We have arranged for Mr. Elmore to occupy the apartment of the Countess Tarasova, who has gone to France—a superb set of rooms magnificently furnished. Two of my own men will act as servants." He smiled. "Mr. Elmore brings his own butler, I understand?"

Zarin bowed.

"He does," he said. "You have done well, Petroff. Now—I want certain things. Can the censor supply me with copies of all telegrams and cables sent and received in the last year by any individual?"

Petroff nodded.

"Easily," he said.

"Good! And I shall want a list of all sailings for a year."

Within a week Elmore was one of the most popular young men in the feverish war-time society of Archangel, and his rooms had become a rendezvous for officers, officials, agents of all sorts, and especially for beautiful ladies who were disposed, perhaps because it was war-time, to be somewhat unconventional in their behavior.

The afternoon hours, when tea was served, saw his rooms crowded. There was tea—but there were many other drinks as well.

By the end of the second week he was in the center of a veritable whirlpool of social activities and although he was equally popular in official circles, it was being whispered in such quarters that he was "inclined to be somewhat indiscreet." In fact, a rumor had it that he had been discussing somewhat freely matters of a rather delicate nature in the presence of strangers.

Zarin, speaking Russian with a strong French accent, was performing his duties of butler to perfection. Mingling among the guests, bearing trays of good things to eat and presiding over Elmore's wine-table, his keen eyes and ears missed nothing.

On one occasion, a group of guests, including a certain jovial individual of striking appearance and surpassing popularity whose beaming face had long afforded a keen attraction for the dark eyes of Zarin, started toward the wine-table. There was just then the slightest exchange of glances between Elmore and Zarin, and in another instant Elmore had stepped forward to join them.

"Step up, gentlemen!" he called out. "Come forward and let's have a bit of cheer. This is American whisky, gentlemen. That's the proper spirit, Nikolai—fill them full! That's the idea! Only able to get a few bottles of this from the captain of one of our ships. Funny old boy, he is! Got orders to-day to sail next Friday, but he swore that he'd be damned if he would start a voyage on Friday. Raised so much Cain they had to change the orders to Saturday. Now, gentlemen, display your nerve-power. Hoist them high!"

The contents of all glasses having been disposed of, Elmore insisted that they be filled again.

"Don't be afraid, gentlemen. There's more across the sea where this came from, and I'll be surprised if I don't have a good stock of it here in a few days. That's it, Nikolai! Just above the brim. Hold on, there! The one on the end will stand just a quarter of a drop more. That's the stuff! Yes; I'll have some more pretty soon. In fact," he continued, dropping his voice into something of a confidential tone, "there's a certain shipping conference now in progress in Paris, and if things turn out as I hope, there'll be no scarcity of whisky in this house—and anything I've got you're all welcome to it."

A loud acclaim followed this statement, and, at the suggestion of the jovial individual, all hands joined in an enthusiastic toast to the speedy victory of the Allied cause. But this jovial individual did not suspect that the glance he had directed toward Elmore, as the latter mentioned the sailing-date, had been noted by Zarin.

EACH evening, when the day's activities were ended, Zarin and Elmore sat down to compare notes and prepare a detailed report of their observations. Names of persons who had called, conversations, questions asked, answers given and facial expressions were taken into careful consideration.

With the beginning of the third week they met for the purpose of preparing a final revised tabulation, which, when completed, was as follows:

Fourteen persons had called at Elmore's apartment at least four times during the past two weeks. Of these, five were young women of social prominence, who had asked no questions of a nature calculated to rouse suspicion or displayed any interest in any questions transcending the bounds of their natural sphere of attraction.

Four were local characters, who apparently availed themselves of every opportunity to consume their share of drinks which were free and alleged to contain a reasonable degree of alcoholic stimulus.

Two were lonesome British officers, who frankly admitted that they liked Elmore's company and found his afternoon affairs something of a relief from an otherwise boresome existence.

The three who remained on the list were tabulated as follows:

1. Madame Popova, a striking blonde of perhaps thirty-two, resident of Archangel for four months, highly educated, charming conversationalist, excellent linguist, claims husband was killed in the early days of the war, intensely desirous of proceeding to America.

2. Schulting; native of Stockholm, for ten years head of the leading wholesale commission-house in Archangel, reputed to be one of the city's wealthiest and most philanthropic residents, universally popular, excellent reputation.

3. Korelsky, a young Russian who had lived in America for a number of years, recently returned to Russia expecting to find a paradise after the overthrow of the czar, but has concluded that he would like to return to America.

Zarin scrutinized the list thoughtfully and sat for some moments in silence.

"You say these persons were not introduced to you?" he inquired.

"None of them," replied Elmore. "They came singly and of their own accord. Schulting, as you will recall, came one afternoon to inquire about a certain export-house in New York. He remained for tea at my invitation. I have since met him on the street twice, and he has called here altogether four times. He has invited me to his home on three occasions, but thus far I have not found an opportunity to call.

"Madame Popova and Korelsky called the same day, though not together, each making inquiries as to the possibility of getting to America. She has called, all told, six times, and Korelsky four."

For an hour Zarin looked back over the daily notes of conversations, asking numerous questions of Elmore and making the following observations:

Madame Popova and Schulting had never been present at the apartment at the same time or on the same day. They had alternated in their visits, so that one or the other had been present each afternoon during the past ten days, the one Sunday excepted.

Korelsky had never called for tea. All his visits had been during the morning hours, and he was apparently making sincere efforts to return to America.

"I think we may eliminate Korelsky and consider only Madame Popova and Schulting," was Zarin's final conclusion.

A knock at the door interrupted further conversation, and Elmore rose to admit one of the agents whom Petroff had assigned as a servant in the apartment and through whom Zarin had communicated with the chief.

"A message from the chief," he announced, delivering a sealed envelope to Elmore.

Returning with the envelope, Elmore broke the seal to find that it contained a telegram from headquarters at Petrograd, addressed to Petroff, "to be delivered to headquarters representative in Archangel."

Zarin took the telegram, which was in his individual code, and repaired to his room to decipher it. Within half an hour he returned and handed to Elmore the following:

> Agent 4465 reports that Dubrovsky and his fourteen comrades left here yesterday for Archangel to take passage for Vardö, Norway, on the Norwegian steamer *Olav.*

"Which means that we shall have to hasten our efforts," remarked Zarin. "Agent 4465 is Mishkin, one of the most loyal men in the service. This message is dated last night and has been delayed in transmisson. If Dubrovsky and the others left Petrograd two days ago, then they must have arrived in Archangel by this evening's train.

"But to return to our guests," he continued. "Now that we have reduced our list to a working-basis, we are ready to take our next step. I'll arrange an appointment with Petroff for to-morrow morning."

THEY had to wait for Petroff the next day, and when he reached his office he was greatly excited and launched at once into his story.

"Early this morning, one of our coast-patrols operating in the White Sea near the mouth of the Gulf of Archangel noticed a small launch headed inshore. Becoming suspicious, the patrol started in pursuit and overtook the launch just as she reached shore and pulled alongside a small dock. Unfortunately, the two occupants escaped and fled into a deep wood near by.

"A search of the abandoned launch disclosed two cases containing more than two hundred pounds of TNT. The patrol towed the launch to Economia, where the matter was reported to the commandant and he, in turn, got me on the 'phone at my residence and gave me the details.

"Feeling certain that the explosives must have been transferred to the launch from some incoming ship, I immediately called up the Transport Department and learned that three vessels arrived in port early this morning—two British and one Norwegian."

Zarin, who had listened with intense interest, here interrupted by asking:

"Was the Norwegian vessel the *Olav?*"

"It was," replied Petroff, greatly astonished. "But, tell me; what do you know about the *Olav?*"

"Pardon me for interrupting; I will answer your question later. Pray proceed," answered Zarin.

"Mr. Zarin," returned Petroff, "if there is anything you know about the *Olav*, I shall be very glad if you will share your information with me, because it is of that vessel I am now about to speak.

"Some weeks ago, suspecting that certain cargoes which had left this port consigned to Copenhagen were being transshipped to Germany, I detailed one of my agents to Copenhagen. Having completed his investigations and desiring to return to Archangel if possible by direct boat, he made inquires and learned that the Norwegian steamer *Olav* would sail for Archangel within a few days. Going immediately to the dock where she was berthed, he went aboard and inquired for the captain, only to be informed that he was ashore and would not return until nine that night. At that hour my agent returned to the vessel, found the captain and inquired if it would be possible to secure passage to Archangel.

"The strange thing is that the captain invited his visitor into his cabin, where he asked a number of very unusual questions and finally informed him that, owing to the crowded condition of the ship, it would be impossible to arrange passage for him.

"My agent, a remarkably clever fellow, received the impression that the captain at first suspected that he was somebody else, and had invited him to his cabin, hoping that he would reveal his identity.

"As the man left the ship and was proceeding along the dock, he beheld immediately in front of him the approach of a group of half-drunken seamen. Knowing the boisterous proclivities of drinking sailors ashore and desiring to avoid a personal encounter, he stepped back into the shadow of some large shipping-cases.

"As the seamen passed, he noted that their conversations were in German, and he watched to see whither the party was headed. As you may imagine, his interest was intensely roused when he saw them all go aboard the ship he had just left—the *Olav*.

"Knowing that she was not due to sail for several days and desiring to reach Archangel before her arrival, he took the first train for Stockholm where he caught the Petrograd express, and on arriving there managed to get second-class accommodations on the first train to Archangel.

"And now, gentlemen, I come to something which is of extreme interest. Yesterday morning my agent sat in his compartment on the train reading a paper. Three fellow passengers, occupying the seat directly opposite his, were deep in a low-toned conversation, to which my agent gave no attention until he happened to overhear mention of the word 'Olav.' From that point on he naturally lent his ear, but because of the tone in which they talked and the noise of the train, he was unable to catch anything but fragmentary phrases. I have here a sheet on which, he has written down what as he was able to overhear.

Taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, Petroff continued:

"Several times the word 'Olav' was mentioned. Then there appear the following fragments of disconnected sentences:

" 'Why does the chief trust Popova with——' "

" 'She tried to double-cross one man, but she'll never——' "

AT MENTION of the name Popova, both Zarin and Elmore gave a slight start and exchanged significant glances, which Petroff, engrossed in his memorandum, failed to notice.

"My agent further reports," he went on, "that one of the men, who had a fiendish face, somewhat accentuated by a deep scar over his left eye, in a burst of anger, remarked:

" 'She will pay us all that's due or I'll——' "

"Whereupon one of his companions shook him by the shoulder, and shortly thereafter they all went into another compartment and joined a group with whom they seemed to be well acquainted.

"Upon the arrival of my agent last night, he came immediately to headquarters and reported fully to me concerning his trip to Copenhagen, the result of his investigations there and, lastly, his experiences with the *Olav*. You may, therefore, imagine my feelings, gentlemen, when, less than two hours ago, upon the heels of the report that explosives had been found on board the launch, I learned that the *Olav* had arrived in port this morning.

"Without waiting for breakfast I drove immediately to the transport office, where I found the assistant to the chief transport officer, with whom I had talked over the 'phone. He was able to give me within a very few minutes the information I sought.

"This is the *Olav's* second trip to Archangel. She arrived on her previous trip on June twenty-fourth, with a cargo of general merchandise consigned to a local commission-house and took on a cargo of flax, departing on the twenty-ninth. During her stay here she discharged seven members of her crew and took on ten.

"It is most important here to note that on June thirtieth, just one day after she sailed, we discovered, as I have already told you, a large quantity of high explosives hidden in a barn. That is the information I desired to lay before you."

"Most interesting," observed Zarin,

thoughtfully. "Extremely interesting and important."

"And what must be our next step?" asked Petroff. "Surely we have sufficient evidence to warrant the seizure and search of this vessel. I say that we should lose no time. First thing we know we'll all be blown to the skies."

Zarin sat for a few moments in silence and then, turning to Petroff, said:

"Mr. Petroff, I have come this morning to make several requests of you. I want certain files of telegrams and certain information from the transport office, but of that I will speak later. Any mvoe against the *Olav* at this time would upset all my plans. I am, therefore, going to make this request: Will you leave this case entirely in my hands and agree to permit me to handle it in my own way?"

"Mr. Zarin," answered the chief, "since you have been assigned here by headquarters, I could not properly refuse to grant your request. But I cannot be responsible if——"

"I shall assume all responsibility," replied Zarin. "And now, before we proceed further, I should like to ask you a question. You say that the *Olav*, on her last voyage, brought a general cargo consigned to a local commission-house. Do you happen to know just which house it was?"

"Yes, I do," replied Petroff. "The cargo was consigned to the Schulting house—one of the largest and most reputable firms in North Russia."

"Thank you," answered Zarin. "And now, Chief, since you have consented to my handling this case in my own way, I consider it only proper that I should explain the requests I am about to make of you.

"We have long suspected that a German submarine base existed somewhere along the Arctic coast, perhaps between Kola Bay and the Norwegian port of Vardö.

"What Germany fears most just now is Allied intervention in Russia. The Teutons know that a powerful Allied force landed in Russia just now would play havoc with their plans to bring about the complete demoralization of the Russian fighting machine.

"Obviously, the most logical point for Allied intervention in Russia is through the northern ports of Archangel and Murmansk. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand why the German-Bolshevik combination is beginning to direct its energetic attention to the North.

"Now, let us consider for a moment the situation here in Archangel. From the beginning it has been, of course, certain that some agency in Archangel has been watching the movement of outgoing vessels and communicating secretly with a German submarine base, which cannot be very far distant. They could not use the wireless for that purpose, so they must have made use of the cables.

"THE question is: Who in Archangel has been cabling, and how has he been able to do it?

"The first thing is, of course, to find the man. To attempt to study the tens of thousands of cables which have passed between Archangel and the ports of Murmansk, Vardö, Pechenga, Alexandrovsk and Kandalaksha in an attempt to discover the use of a secret code would be absolutely hopeless. A lifetime would be too short in which to do this. It has, therefore, been necessary for us to reduce our working hypothesis to a reasonable basis. Fortunately, we arrived here at a propitious moment. America has just entered the war; American cargoes landed in Archangel have quardrupled within the past six weeks. If Allied intervention is forthcoming, America must take the lead. She has the man-power, the ships and the necessary munitions. Nobody knows that so well as Germany.

"Since our arrival, Elmore, here, known as the new American shipping inspector, has been undoubtedly the one individual upon whom the German-Bolshevik organization has centered its attention. The information which they most desire just now is supposed to be in his possession. Of course they would not be such fools as to attempt to buy him. They have, therefore, sought to cultivate him.

"It is inconceivable that they would assign an agent of ordinary ability to such an important task. If there is a master of the German secret service in Archangel, we may be sure that he has personally taken upon himself that duty.

"That accounts for our having taken the apartment. By a careful observation and the preparation of daily reports, we have been able, by elimination, to reduce the circle of possibilities to a point where our experiments might begin. Those experiments have been in progress for some days and, as a result, I believe I can name the man we are looking for."

"What?" shouted Petroff. "Do you mean you know who he is? What have you done?"

Zarin smiled and continued:

"It is, after all, a very simple problem in psychology. One may have absolute control over his conscious mind, but the will of man cannot exercise a direct control over the subconscious. I maintain that the subconsciousness of any man—no matter how great a mentality he may possess or how great an actor he may be—can be brought into action against his will and that, while such action may be entirely imperceptible to his own consciousness, it is quite perceptible externally.

"Let us take, for instance, this example: You are a criminal operating under an assumed name. You have not heard your real name mentioned for years, and yet you constantly have that lingering fear that some day you may be recognized. Suppose that you are in the midst of a gay party and somebody tells a funny story and you burst into a fit of laughter. In the midst of your laughter, some one whispers to you your real name. No power you may possess could prevent a slight change in your facial expression. You may continue laughing and imagine yourself in perfect possession of your faculties, but, nevertheless, that very slight, unconscious, fleeting change in your expression would be quite perceptible to the trained observer. In order to produce a visible result of this subconscious action, the subject must be thrown completely off his guard.

"Such is the method we have employed here in Archangel. For instance, we will say that a certain person under observation is invited to have a drink. We take for granted that he is the man we are seeking. Why has he repeatedly come to the apartment? Obviously for information. Of course, he has not dared ask a single question which could possibly rouse suspicion. He is too shrewd for that. But his ears have been constantly alert to pick up anything which could be of interest to him or to the country he represents. That is his one motive. That is the desire which constantly stands before him.

"There are various methods of reducing mental resistance. Certain mesmerists cause their subjects to gaze upon a piece of shining metal. Mediums have been known to fall into trances by gazing upon crystal balls.

"In our case, we have caused the subject to gaze upon a whisky-glass. The glass is filled by the observer, while the confederate draws the subject's attention to the operation by a description of the whisky he is about to consume. The glass is filled to the brim. In order to concentrate the attention of the subject still more closely, the observer slowly adds a few more drops until the whisky rises slightly above the brim. The attention of the subject is now thoroughly fixed upon the glass. The confederate, in an apparently unconscious manner, blurts out certain information which should be of highest importance to the subject. If it is interesting to him, he will shift his gaze, sometimes very slightly, but, to the eye of the observer, that very slight change is sufficient. If the information is of no interest to him, there will, of course, be no change whatsoever in the facial expression."

"My dear Mr. Zarin," remarked the puzzled Petroff, "I have often heard of your remarkable achievements. I am of the old school, though, and it is hard for me to get away from its methods. I suppose, however, that in our work, as in all other, the old ways are being supplanted by the new."

"But, of course, as yet we have not the slightest evidence in our hands," continued Zarin. "We simply have a basis upon which to work, and I am now ready to have a look at the records I am going to ask you to obtain for me from the chief censor and the transport office."

FOR the next two days Elmore saw but little of his companion. With a large bundle of papers, which he had obtained through Petroff, Zarin kept closely to his room, while the American was left to take care of the household and social duties without the help of his very efficient butler.

As luck would have it, a bad spell of weather had set in and for two days it rained almost continually, so that few persons called at the apartment. Those who did found their genial host personally presiding over the wines and the samovar, explaining that the absence of his faithful *maître d'hôtel* was due to a slight indisposition.

On the morning of the third day, Zarin came in to breakfast looking somewhat dejected.

"What's the matter, old man? Have you struck a snag?" Elmore inquired.

"The greatest snag I have ever struck," Zarin replied, with downcast eyes.

"Nothing has come of the examination of the telegrams and shipping records?" Elmore asked.

"Everything has come of it," answered Zarin. "The evidence is complete. In fact, I have found more than I dared hope to find. The case is clear."

"Then why do you say you have struck this grave snag?"

Zarin did not reply. Taking from his pocket a single sheet of paper, he spread it out upon the table before him. It was a statement of the outward-bound vessels which had been sunk during the past few months and the number of lives lost in each case, together with a report of casualties in the two recent explosions.

"Six thousand human beings!" he muttered, in a voice that was hoarse. "Six thousand lives, without a chance to defend themselves!"

Replacing the paper in his pocket, he turned and faced his companion.

"Elmore," he said, "do you realize that at this moment civilization hangs in the balance? There have been bloody outbreaks in the interior—wanton destruction of the men who have sought to save our country and carry on the fight that civilization might endure. Although the Bolshevik forces have been temporarily subdued, you know and I know—after what we have seen—that their ultimate success is inevitable. Who can say when the change shall come? Perhaps to-morrow; perhaps in a week or a month or six months. And then what? You ask me what snag I have struck. It is this: What shall we do with the evidence we have?

"The *Olav* lies alongside our docks, filled with enemies. I am sure that Dubrovsky and his fourteen fellow conspirators against Russia and against humanity have gone aboard her in the guise of seamen. The man with the scar whom Petroff's agent saw on the train—well, I know that Dubrovsky has such a scar.

"Suppose we seize them all. Then what? Remember, this is not an ordinary case, which could be handled by the local authorities. Too much is at stake. Too many are involved. It is too stupendous. It would necessarily have to go to Petrograd. That would involve endless delays. And, meanwhile, what will have happened? With the enemy growing stronger with each hour, do you imagine for a moment that it would permit its agents to pay the penalty which the laws of war would demand? Tell me frankly, Elmore, do you think that, in the present condition of things, these conspiring murderers could be brought to justice?"

"Frankly, I do not," replied Elmore. "The only thing we could hope to attain would be a public exposure and at least a temporary cessation of their activities."

Striking his fist violently upon the table, Zarin glared at his companion and in a low, harsh voice, said,

"Rather than risk that I shall permit the *Olav* to sail."

"Man, are you mad?" cried Elmore.

Zarin smiled. It was a strange smile; in another instant there came over his face something of a pathetic look.

"Elmore," he said, "forgive me if I appear upset. My nerves are rather shaken. By the way, if you don't mind, I am going to have a drink of your excellent whisky."

IN ANSWER, Elmore rose and took from the cabinet a bottle and two glasses, which he placed on the table before Zarin, and resumed his seat.

"Before I open this bottle," began Zarin, "there are one or two things I wish to say to you—and then I would be glad if you would join me in a drink.

"The *Olav* will sail next Tuesday morning at six o'clock. May I request you to invite Mr. Schulting to have dinner with us here that evening?"

"My God, Zarin, do you really intend to permit the *Olav* to sail?" exclaimed Elmore.

"I have fully made up my mind; so let us not discuss that further," Zarin replied firmly. "And you will invite Schulting?"

"Of course. But I really don't see why his further presence here is necessary. You say yourself that the evidence is complete."

"There is a reason why I wish you to invite him," returned Zarin. "Perhaps you might call him up now."

Without another word, Elmore made his way to the 'phone in the library, while Zarin reached for the bottle and poured out two wine-glasses of whisky—filled to the brim.

When the American returned, Zarin looked up at him questioningly.

"Schulting has accepted the invitation and promises to honor us with his presence on next Tuesday evening at six-thirty," Elmore announced.

"So much for that," replied Zarin. "Now, if you will take up that glass, I want you to join me in a drink."

As they raised their glasses, Zarin continued:

"I swear to you that as long as I live to breathe the air of God, I shall defend my country against her enemies. Great Russia may be destroyed, but Zarin will have consolation in the knowledge that he fought until the end. It is a comfort to know that I have your friendship, my noble ally."

"My friend," Elmore replied, "I do not know what you have in mind, but, whatever it is, I stand with you."

Two glasses were lifted high, and two men drank a pledge to civilization.

ON TUESDAY morning Zarin and Elmore met at the breakfast-table. The same haggard expression had returned to Zarin's pale face. All the previous day he had been busily engaged in conferences, returning to the apartment at midnight.

"Well, anything of interest?" Elmore inquired.

"The *Olav* was scheduled to sail this morning at six. She must be well on her way by now."

"And Dubrovsky—and the others?" Elmore asked.

"All on board," was the reply.

As Zarin finished his tea, he pushed back his chair somewhat from the table.

"By the way," he continued, after a pause, "as you have invited Schulting to dinner this evening, I have taken the liberty of inviting Petroff."

"Petroff!" exclaimed Elmore, with a look of surprise. "Don't you think that his presence here would rouse Schulting's suspicion?"

"We'll take a chance on that. Besides, it would not matter now," Zarin replied.

A few minutes later Zarin left the house, announcing that he would return for lunch. Elmore turned his attention to the kitchen and within a few moments the machinery of preparation for the evening's meal was in operation.

Returning to the library, he took up a book and, after making a few unsuccessful attempts to settle down to read, threw the volume aside and gazed blankly into space while he reviewed the train of events which had followed the appearance of Zarin at his apartment in Petrograd less than a month before.

Throughout the three years of his close association with the secret-service man, Elmore had come to marvel more and more at his methods and eccentricities. No one who knew Zarin ever dared hazard a guess as to what his next move would be. No mind had yet been able to fathom his thoughts. What was in his mind now, and how he was expecting to terminate the present case, which was apparently drawing to a speedy close, Elmore had not the faintest idea.

Dubrovsky and his comrades had been permitted to escape. Yet Zarin had virtually confessed that his hatred of his friend's murderer had led him to undertake the case in which they were now engaged.

The ship on which they had gone was known to be a hostile vessel, filled with murderous enemies.

What had Zarin discovered in his examination of the telegrams?

Why was he so anxious to have Schulting at the dinner?

The more Elmore attempted to fathom the case the more perplexing it became, and he was still hopelessly lost in a cloud of bewildering thoughts when Zarin returned.

"What are you thinking about now?" Zarin inquired, as he came into the library and noticed Elmore's preoccupation.

Before Elmore could reply the 'phone-bell rang and Zarin stepped forward to answer. Having received a message, he replied.

"I know Mr. Elmore will be very sorry, but, of course, he will understand."

"Now, what have I to be sorry for?" inquired Elmore, when Zarin had hung up.

"Mr. Schulting's secretary, speaking for him, desires to say that he deeply regrets his inability to have dinner with you this evening. Business requirements, which were entirely unforeseen, have called him away for a few days, but he hopes to see you on his return."

"Good God!" shouted Elmore, springing from his chair. "Schulting gone—escaped! Do you think he could have grown suspicious?"

"It is possible, though hardly probable," Zarin replied. "In any case, he will not go very far. He is being watched."

"But his absence to-night will break up your plans," observed Elmore.

"Not necessarily," Zarin replied, and, without another word he dropped into a chair and hardly moved until luncheon was announced.

DURING the afternoon an unusually large number of visitors called. Zarin was in his place, and Elmore, realizing that he was no longer a mere actor in a play, was enjoying his freedom immensely.

Shortly after the last caller had departed, Petroff arrived. Zarin had retired to his room to remove his butler's garb. Petroff clearly displayed an attitude of extreme displeasure. Taking advantage of the absence of Zarin, he did not hesitate to express to Elmore his complete inability to comprehend just what Zarin was about.

"Here I have worked these many months and, just as we have the blackguards within our grasp, he deliberately permits them to steam out of the harbor. Why should he want to call out the whole Northern patrol to seize the *Olav* and take her to Murmansk when we could have seized her here with such ease? It is absolutely beyond me. I will go further—it is mockery—pure mockery!"

"Mr. Petroff," said Elmore, quickly coming to the defense of his friend, "I have been intimately associated with Zarin for a long time. Many times his methods have completely baffled me—but I have such profound faith in him that I venture to predict that within a very short time all your fears will be set at ease."

Zarin's appearance cut short further conversation, though Elmore noted that his reassuring remarks had had but slight effect on Petroff's attitude.

Thanks to an adequate supply of excellent wine and Elmore's desperate attempts to keep the conversation along congenial lines, the dinner passed off without any outbreak of hostilities between Zarin and Petroff.

When the last course had been removed, Zarin excused himself and went to his room, quickly returning with a considerable number of papers, which he placed before him upon the table.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, "as we are approaching the end of our labors here, I feel that it is only fair to you that I should outline the course of action which I have pursued. But, first, I should like to ask Mr. Petroff if he has yet received any report from the naval staff."

"As the chief of staff promised us yesterday," replied Petroff, "he ordered the entire Murman coast-patrol, consisting of six destroyers and twice as many small patrol-boats, to seize the *Olav* and take her into the port of Murmansk in case she should attempt to put into Vardö or any other port along the northern coast. As yet I have no report, but I have left word at the Staff that any information upon the subject should be transmitted to me here."

"Very good," replied Zarin. "Now I shall proceed to lay before you the details of the case as they have developed up to the present moment."

For the next hour Zarin described to Petroff every move that he and Elmore had made, from the beginning to the moment when he had requested Petroff to procure for him through the chief censor and the transport office copies of certain telegrams and shipping records.

When he reached this point, he requested that Petroff and Elmore take chairs on either side of him, so that they might be able to follow closely his explanations of the records.

"From the transport records," he continued, "we learn that during the present shipping season fifteen vessels which have left the port of Archangel have been sunk by enemy submarines. Of these fifteen, four were British, eight Russian, one Danish, three Norwegian and one Swedish. A British vessel was the first to go down. It was a Thursday on which she sailed. On the preceding day the following telegram was sent by Schulting to his Vardö branch: 'Quotations on flour in ten-ton lots unsatisfactory.'

"Quite an innocent telegram, isn't it? In fact, it was so innocent that the censor's office passed it, and it was dispatched within two hours after being filed. But let us go on. Of the fifteen ships which were sunk, two sailed on Tuesday, three on Wednesday, four on Thursday and six on Saturday.

"Prior to the sailing of each of those vessels—sometimes preceding the sailing by two days and sometimes by only a few hours—Schulting sent an apparently innocent business telegram to his agency at Vardö.

"A close examination of the copies of those messages shows conclusively that he was transmitting certain definite information to the enemy.

"When ships were to sail on Tuesday, the word 'sugar' was invariably mentioned. Wednesday was designated by the word 'shoes,' Thursday by 'flour,' Saturday by 'flax.'

"British ships were designated by the appearance in the telegram of the figure 'ten,' Russian by 'fifteen,' Danish by 'twenty,' Norwegian by 'twenty-five,' Swedish by 'thirty.'

"For instance, if he desired to communicate that a British ship was sailing on Tuesday, he would simply send this telegram: 'Get prices on *sugar ten*-ton lots,' 'sugar' meaning Tuesday and 'ten' meaning British.

"If a Danish ship were sailing on Wednesday, he would communicate that fact as follows: 'What about the *twenty* cases of *shoes?*'

"Now, the next step in his code was ascertained by the discovery that messages containing similar code-words were likewise sent before the departure of vessels *which were not sunk.*

"For instance, before the sailing of the steamer *Olav* on her last trip, he sent a message indicating that a Norwegian vessel was sailing on a certain day, but there appeared in the body of the message the word 'acceptable.' In every case where the word 'acceptable' appeared, the vessel referred to was *not sunk*, whereas in every case where the word 'unsatisfactory' appeared in the body of the message, the vessel referred to *was sunk.*

"Therefore, we have before us the following code:

"If a Swedish vessel is leaving port on Saturday and there is some reason why Schulting wants her to pass out in safety, he simply sends the folowing message: 'Quotations on *thirty* tons *flax acceptable.*'

"If the same vessel is to be sunk, the message is sent thus: 'Quotations on *thirty* tons *flax unsatisfactory.*'"

"It is absolutely marvelous!" exclaimed Petroff, his attitude of coldness having been rapidly transformed into one of intense interest.

"But, to go further," continued Zarin, "I find, in looking over the record of departing passengers for the past year, that Schulting has made four trips to Vardö. By examining the cables received by him during that period, I find that, out of two hundred and sixty-five messages received, only four contained the phrase, 'interest due,' and that each of those particular cables was received just prior to his departure for Vardö. For instance, just before his first departure he received the following message: '*Interest due* on the Shelton notes. Wire instructions.'

"Before his second departure, he received the following: 'When is *interest due* on Engleson notes?'

"Similar phrases occurred in telegrams sent on the two other occasions. The shipping records show that after the receipt of each of the four messages containing that particular phrase, he took the first available boat for Vardö. I have no doubt that a continued investigation would disclose many more interesting codes, but I don't see that any further evidence is necessary."

"Absolutely conclusive!" exclaimed Petroff, beaming with enthusiasm.

"THERE is just one question I want to ask," Elmore remarked. "Why did you wish me to invite Schulting here for dinner to-night?"

"Because I had reason to believe that he would not be in the city to-day—and I wanted to be certain of it," was the reply.

"And there is one question I would like to ask," said Petroff. "Why did you conclude to have the Murman naval forces capture the *Olav* at sea when you could have had it done so much more easily here?"

At that moment there was a ring at the door. Zarin went forward to answer, remarking as he passed out,

"Remember, I am still butler here."

As he opened the door, a young naval lieutenant stepped forward.

"A message from the chief of the naval staff for Mr. Petroff," he announced.

"Very good, sir. I shall deliver it to him," answered Zarin, taking the message and closing the door.

As he returned to the dining-room, Zarin resumed his seat and placed the unopened message to Petroff upon the table.

"Before you open this message," he said, "there are just one or two additional points I desire to bring to your attention.

"We called upon the chief censor yesterday morning and found that Schulting had filed two additional messages, one on Saturday and one on Sunday, which, at your request, had been held up. Here is a copy of the message filed on Saturday, which I shall read to you:

"SCHULTING, VARDÖ:
"Am shipping fifteen empty vinegar-casks.
"SCHULTING."

"Which means, if you will recall the message found in poor Salov's hand, that Schulting is sending to Vardö the fifteen submarine conspirators. That, of course, constituted final and indisputable evidence that Schulting was the director of enemy espionage here.

"The second message, filed on Sunday, reads as follows:

"SCHULTING, VARDÖ:
"Prices on twenty-five tons sugar acceptable.
"SCHULTING."

"Meaning, if we consult the code, 'Norwegian vessel leaving port on Tuesday to be spared.'

"That message was sent on to its destination yesterday morning, except that I took the trouble to make a very slight alteration in the wording, changing 'acceptable' to 'unsatisfactory.'"

"In the name of God, man, what do you mean?" shouted the dumfounded Petroff, springing to his feet.

"Sit down, please, and permit me to finish," Zarin calmly replied, picking up the final sheet of his records. "Here is a telegram which I prepared at the office of the chief censor yesterday, which he was good enough to transmit to Mr. Schulting. It is as follows:

"SCHULTING, ARCHANGEL:
"Advise when interest due on last notes.
"SCHULTING COMPANY."

Both Petroff and Elmore were on their feet in an instant.

"Then Schulting was on the *Olav!*" cried Elmore.

"He was," replied Zarin, taking up the message addressed to Petroff and handing it over to him.

Petroff hurriedly broke the seal and, as he read the message, he threw it upon the table and fell back into his chair, staring in amazement at Zarin, who picked up the message and read as follows:

"The chief of the naval staff transmits to Mr. Petroff the following radiogram, which has just been received from the chief of the Murman patrol: 'Norwegian steamer *Olav* torpedoed by enemy submarine at ten-thirty to-night. Struck amidships and sank almost immediately. All on board lost.'"

ELMORE stood in speechless wonder. Petroff, seemingly dazed and unable to find words with which to express himself, reached forward and poured out two large drinks of whisky, which he quickly disposed of.

"It is as I wanted it to be," continued Zarin. "To guard against a possible failure, I requested that the Murman patrol seize the *Olav* if she managed to get by the submarine and attempted to put into Vardö or any of the northern ports.

"The rules of warfare are sometimes harsh—but, gentlemen, this is war. And it seems particularly fitting that these sneaking murderers, conspiring to deliver our beloved country into the hands of destruction, should be the victims of their own dastardly weapons.

"Thanks to Schulting's ingenious treachery, which has cost the lives of thousands of men, his own miserable bones are now sinking to join theirs at the bottom of the sea.

"No doubt, Mr. Petroff, you will find it of interest to call upon Madame Popova in the morning. Dubrovsky's mention of her makes her a suspect. She will, I think, be able to give some valuable information which will lead to the arrest of any remaining agents who may have conspired with those upon whom justice has been done.

"And thus, my dear Elmore, our work here comes to an end."

The next story of this series will appear in June EVERYBODY'S.

A Novelette

Mountain Farmers

A Book Publisher Said of This Story That Only One of Five or Six Men Could Have Written It. An Editor Has Compared It Favorably with the Work of Thomas Hardy

By Stanley Olmsted

Illustrations by Donald Teague

A LINE of cleared slope cut across the four panes of glass set in the logs of Donbrook's cabin. It streaked the cross-checkering downward with a sharp diagonal like an edge of green flame, clear and lambent against a wall of woods not yet in leaf. Whisking sunlight saturated this upland field. Charred shadow lay on the perpendicular flatness which barred it at the narrower end of White Wing Valley.

When Donbrook looked up from the bescribbled yellow paper piling on the little table where he wrote, this cross-barred square of live emerald confronted him. His sight plunged into it, lost itself in its glazed, intensive palpitance. He became a crystal-gazer.

Behind him, a hundred feet nearer the creek and on lower ground, was the larger house in which dwelt the last three remaining McKennas—two sisters and a brother.

A month earlier, while snow yet lay in many of the hollows, they had welcomed him as a boarder-guest, though he was a stranger, a Northerner and a "city man." They had received him as they might have received some member of their own scattered clan returned from exile. There was a tie of kinship between them. One-sixteenth of the blood flowing in his veins was their own blood. He was "Cousin Chester."

The cabin where they lodged him had been built with its back turned squarely on their own dwelling by the creek. Through its door came the sound of Melissa's paddle as she beat out the washing on the bench beside the spring-house. Day and night Donbrook kept his door wide open unless the rain came driving down the ridge against it. Like the window, its effect was that of a flat rectangle of light hung squarely on his shadowy log walls.

But the color, in this instance, was the brown of earth newly plowed. A snake fence, dropping dizzily to his very threshold, divided the brown into two even sections. It dangled in relentless zigzag before his eyes, suspended somewhere from the line of woods where the plowed steeps terminated above his line of vision.

The effect was of something pendent, slightly oscillating, something insecure and threatening, something that might fall at any moment and crush out the front wall of his cabin—crush out the imaginative detachment in his brain—crush himself.

He preferred to look toward the window, framing its cross-barred flame of green.

At the wash-bench by the spring-house Lissie stopped beating out the clothes. He could not see her, though the spring gushed from the base of the ridge's rise not fifty yards ahead of him; a clump of service trees foaming with white bloom shut her in, and even they were outside the confines of the brown rectangle which his absent gaze instinctively avoided.

But sometimes he looked in that direction despite himself. This would be when the

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figure of Wade McKenna and his plow and his team of horses crossed the oblong of his door, a slow-moving blur of dun hues. They might have been a clump of clods, loosened and obeying some law which drew them horizontally instead of downward. They shared the blank apathy of the soil into which they merged. They proclaimed the lethargic power, the sluggish, resistless will, the indomitable force masked by its seeming lifelessness.

There was something sinister about them. Now and then Wade swore at the horses in a voice deadened against the steady roar of White Wing Creek and the opaque rustle of twigs throbbing with their sap, of febrile bird-calls, wearying in mid-afternoon.

"Haw! Damn you, June! Ye quit that jerkin'! Gee-haw you, Jenny! Damn ye; quit that startin'!"

The profanity reached Donbrook's ears spent and far-away, muffled against the furrows. It did not break the calm which held that slow-moving blur as in a viselike grip. It was swallowed up in quarter-hours, half-hours of engulfing deadness. Only when the plow struck a particularly bad stone were June and Jenny cursed. There was no warning before or recrimination after. The words seemed merely some ritualized formality of toil.

Thus seated with the cross-barred design of the window at his right and the oblong of his doorway in front of him, yet in an all-day twilight broken by drippings of light through the decaying shingles of the cabin gable above his head, Donbrook let his pencil propel itself across the paper hour after hour, day after day.

The city in which, as it seemed to him, he had been ground to dust from his early manhood on was a thousand miles away. It must needs have been on the planet of Mars to justify his sense of its remoteness.

Out of the disintegrated atoms of himself, here in these mountains, he was constructing a new being. He was attaining resurrection.

THE week's wash was the one task among all the tasks overlapping both daybreak and nightfall that Lissie was beginning to dread. Of late years she had grown stouter than ever, with a stoutness that bulged in odd places, giving her the feeling of being chained to weights which she must carry about.

Even in the longest daylight time of midsummer, Wade always called through the log partition, rousing herself and Clara from their sleep while it was still dark. In the winter she prepared his breakfast long hours before the dawn. Night in winter seemed split into two halves, bridged by this meal—one of sleep, the other of dull waiting for daylight. Clara would have helped her at it, but she refused to permit it, arguing very logically that because one of them must beat herself into wakefulness was no reason why two should. So Clara, like Wade, lay still until Lissie blew a whistle to remind them she was setting the table, in case either of them had dozed off again.

Yet, with himself, Wade was consistently relentless. His capacity for toil, the ceaseless, slow driving power within him, was a proverb in cove and cabin up and down Little White Wing. In the dead of winter, when other farmers took their rest by their log fires, he toiled fifteen hours a day in the blacksmith shop he had rigged out for himself, or tramped days through the mountains, rounding up his hogs and cattle.

Of Donbrook, their summer boarder, he entertained a diminishing opinion, tapering off from instinctive deference accorded him in the beginning. The new cousin might be, and no doubt was, a "fine, eddicated feller" and "used to the best." He was entertaining, too—when he joined the three of them about the fire in the larger cabin between supper and bedtime. He brought the overwhelming walled-out world beyond their mountains into a nearness that was almost friendly. He made it seem somehow more homely, more conceivable.

But it bewildered Wade more and more to think that any man could be so mortal lazy as to sit all day long twisting a pencil above sheets of yellow paper—covering acres of it with words so illegible that Wade had to doubt whether they were honest writing at all. More than once the ugly suspicion had welled up in him that the fellow just sat there "a-makin' marks."

Lissie dreaded the wash more than her other work because it was the one thing at which she could not sit down. The dread was inarticulate. For that matter, nothing in her destiny had ever been complicated by any distinct mental protest.

Or if it had, nobody had suspected it, not even Clara, whose share of the work was to feed the cattle, milk the cows, keep the two cabins swept and in order, and make and maintain the garden which supplied them with vegetables. On wash-days Clara also did the cooking. Such division of tasks between the two women represented no prearranged plan. It had been evolved, gradually, through Clara's willingness to be about on her feet where Lissie's inclination was to sit whenever possible.

The weekly washing was just a remaining misadjustment. Lissie had begun it thirty years ago when, as a girl of fifteen, she had been the oldest of eleven living McKenna children and Clara was a babe in arms. It had become a lifetime habit. She lacked the initiative to change it. Alterations in their scheme of life were reticent things, moving at the pace of a snail over decades of years.

Indeed, now that but three of them were left, Melissa's days were leisure incarnate compared to what they had been in her youth. On the Santeetlah Creek, twelve miles to the northwest of the Little White Wing, her father had hewn the forest trees and built with his own hands the largest log house of the region—in proportions that suited his love of space.

Beginning with Lissie's eighth year, Mrs. McKenna had little by little relinquished to her oldest daughter the various household tasks, dividing her own time between her own garden and the recurrent youngest baby. The garden became as famous as word of mouth, traveling over the mountain trails, could make it. There was none other like it in all the valley of the Santeetlah or in the tracks of the Big and Little White Wing—mating cataracts, foaming along their spiral courses to the southeast.

Grandma Barton, Mrs. McKenna's mother, had lived with them. She had been an intellectual wonder, quite as famous as the garden—a philosopher devoted to religious argumentation with her son-in-law and passers-by along the Santeetlah trail who sought shelter for the night.

By the time Lissie was fifteen, she had to cook, wash, iron, sew and discipline. She was a round-faced, plumply strapping girl, with unquestioning soft blue eyes. Three or four times before that period she had made an effort to secure a few weeks of schooling with some of her younger brothers and sisters at the Beaver Cross meeting-house, six miles away. Each year there were five months of free school, from harvest-time to Christmas.

Lissie never found it possible to get more than an odd day here and there during the term. Yet, with Grandma Barton's rather intolerant aid, she learned somehow both to read and to write—a little. She was of the mountain aristocracy, which regarded illiteracy as proclaiming low caste. Grandma Barton, to the day of her death, was wont to boast that there'd "never been a out-and-out ignoramus" in the Barton or the McKenna brood.

THE right of every young woman to marriage and a family of her own was also a thing established in Lissie's circle. At sixteen she became eligible to free Sunday afternoons and an extra quota of ribbons, visits from young men, usually under for twenty, who were still unmarried. For some reason, few such presented themselves, and when they did, the conversation of Grandma Barton left them speechless.

Something in the meekness of Lissie's shy, infinitely accepting blue eyes seemed to discourage them.

They came in greater numbers and manifested more boldness as some of the younger sisters grew to the age when their white Sunday skirts were lengthened and the ribbons were more lavish. But, by that time, Lissie was well into her twenties—already an "old maid." It was taken for granted that when the young folks sat down on the rocks at the Santeetlah, bantering and "sparkin'," she would prefer to remain with Grandma Barton up at the house.

Grandma Barton had scant appreciation for the arrangement. She wanted the young folks about her; her vanity was piqued when they did not linger to hear her discourse. She frankly regarded Lissie as "mighty pore company." "The porest of any of your children," she often told Mrs. McKenna.

When Lissie was twenty-five, the migrating spirit came again upon Pa McKenna. It had brought him from the pleasant farming lowlands of eastern Tennessee into the wild remoteness of the Santeetlah. It seized him now afresh, and he moved his family across two intervening mountains to an already cleared tract on the Little White Wing.

By that time Lissie had had one courting-affair which had promised a definite outcome. She had worn a gold engagement ring, with a little red "set" in it, crimson as a drop of her own heart's blood.

Nothing had ever come of it. The lad had been a little younger than herself. Neither Pa McKenna nor Grandma Barton, browbeating forces in the household both of them, had liked him or wanted him.

Their objections seemed to be founded less on his youth than on the fact that he had freckles and red hair. McKenna and Barton complexions were all of exceptional clearness. McKenna and Barton hair varied from agreeable blond brown to black.

They had been unable, with their constant ridicule, to shake an iota of Lissie's loyalty and deep trust in the one imaginable happiness for a woman—wifehood with motherhood—at last coming toward her.

But they had frightened off the lad. He had gone West to stake a rough claim, promising to send for her when he could see his way clear. He sent back no letters. Not until a Montana town weekly with a marked notice of his marriage reached the family did Lissie remove the ring with the drop of bloodlike red.

Her one-time betrothed had addressed the newspaper with his own hand to Grandma Barton. He had scribbled something on its margin about red hair and freckles.

Fronting the nearly effaced old logging-road that ran along Little White Wing, Pa McKenna and his sons built another log house, and, back of it, staring straight at the steep ridge, a cabin with an outlying shed for an eighteen-year-old son who had just married and who, shortly after the first baby, deserted the home swarm and took his family to Texas.

Three years or so thereafter, the first passenger train crawled up and down the giddy mountain grades as far as Nantahala, only twenty miles to eastward.

At Nantahala, they roasted two oxen. The family did not return from the celebration until well after dark of the third day.

There had been hardly any work at all for Lissie while they were gone—not even cooking. She and Grandma Barton had found "cold snacks" perfectly satisfactory. It had been a heavenly rest, following, as it did, the week of Herculean labor, preparing festival supplies—cakes, pies, pickles, chickens fried and roasted, boiled beef, boiled hog's meat, sacks of biscuit and corn pone for the picnic festivity, all devolving upon her practically unaided hands.

Like the trip from Santeetlah to White Wing—the longest, indeed the only journey within her memory—this three days' holiday remained unique in her life.

DONBROOK had stored in his imagination much of the foregoing family history as it came from the lips of Clara.

Clara, the youngest McKenna child, was now thirty. But the lines of her cleanly oval face, squared at the chin, the contours of her slim figure were those of a girl. She was no less feminine for the fact that there was a something of ozonic boyishness about her. Time had not touched her save in her smooth black hair—little gray streaks that showed but shiftingly when they showed at all. She explained to Cousin Chester that the grayness had come during the two years in which a favorite brother, Ezekiel, and Ma McKenna and Pa McKenna and Grandma Barton all had died—one right after the other.

Her eyes were the deep blue of the slate outcropping along the banks of the White Wing, though the slate showed this blue only when the light glanced across it in a certain way that brought out its color.

It pleased Chester Donbrook that she could talk of the most poignant memories simply and detachedly, without the least blurring of tears or choke in her voice. The youngest of her clan, she had found more time for school than the others, and many harsher crudities of the mountain vernacular were absent or softened in her speech. Stray books and magazines she had picked up and read; thoughts she had dreamed, quick reactions to the beauty about her had erased them.

All the family save herself and Lissie and Wade were now dead, or married and scattered.

One of the little excursions she planned was to take Donbrook some day to look at the graves over in the old Axe field, a mile away.

"It used to be the prettiest place anywhere around," she had told him. "But the woods are growin' up all over it now—

and Wade was busy and kept neglectin' to build rail fences around the graves until the hogs rooted up nearly all the flowerin' shrubs I set out. Mother picked out the spot herself. She hoped all of us would be buried there. We won't go there yet a while. It's so much prettier when the spring's a little further along."

She was a good little stoic. About her lingered all the resiliency of maidenhood. Toil had buffeted her, and simple, hardy sorrows. Isolation, too, had put lurking unconscious appeals in the open depths of her eyes. But all things had combined to keep her virginal in thought, in gesture, in soul.

Donbrook was thinking of all this as he paused to-day in his work.

THE luminous green rectangle at his right darkened with the passing of a heavy, ungainly figure, laboriously holding a basket in front of her. It was Lissie, bringing down an instalment of the wash to hang out on the rope line.

Down along the perilous fence-line directly before him, with its effect of continuous, slight oscillation in the open oblong of his door, another figure slipped lithely. Clara was beladen with boughs of the white-blooming service. Sometimes she transferred them deftly to a single arm and extended the other hand to the fence rails, to readjust her balance in the headlong descent.

When she was quite near, she could see Donbrook dimly, seated before his table in the twilight of his cabin. She held her great armful of flowers aloft to him, laughing.

"I'm sort of fallin' into yer room," she called.

He met her at his threshold and relieved her of her burden—the mystical trailing flowers, so emblematic of a bride.

Cool little beads of moisture were on the smooth, straight brow beneath her banded hair. He resisted a longing to stroke them away with the caress of his finger-tips. The skirt and blouse she wore, once a dark-blue cotton, had faded in Lissie's washings to the remote deep-slate color of her eyes. She was panting with the breathlessness of her descent.

As she crossed his door-sill, the long slant shadows on the uplands and the softer spots of restless dimness cast by little clouds were blotted out, as if some word of command had been spoken. The sun dropped behind a blunt-pointed peak to the west.

White Wing Valley had attained its mid-afternoon twilight, which would fade, by long stages, well-nigh imperceptibly into dusk and darkness.

"They grow the prettiest up on top of the ridge," she half apologized. "I finished my hoein' in the garden, and then just made up my mind to climb the trail."

"You're all perspiring," he said, dividing the flowers between two stone churning-crocks that stood, one by the window, the other near the big fireplace built of rocks from the fields. "It's the first outright warm day we've had, isn't it?"

"It's a-goin' to turn cold, though. Better git Wade to stock ye up with fire-wood to-night."

"I think he's tired of keeping me in fire-wood," said Donbrook. "And I don't blame him. Sometime before night I'll take the wheelbarrow and gather a load of the drift along the creek-bank."

"It makes a hotter fire than the green cut wood," she said. "But it burns up too quick. Ye need long-lastin' fires to get all these books read."

He had, indeed, brought with him a great trunkful—essays, poems, everything he could never find more than a fleeting moment for in the harried, worried life of the newspaper worker in New York.

The books were stacked neatly in the corner farthest from the fireplace. Clara stood, lifting and looking at one after another. He bent above her, explaining, commenting. The service blooms in the crock splayed over them with gusts of elusive odor. Often, as he guided her turning of the pages, his shoulder touched her own.

Once, as they talked, the dimming light in the cabin went nearly dark for an instant. The heavy-moving silhouette of Lissie had passed very close to the window as she returned to the spring-house.

It was a signal bringing the younger sister to a sense of duty.

"I ought to be goin' down to the house and startin' supper," she said.

"Don't go—yet," he protested. He had taken both her hands in tentative good-by. His eyes pleaded.

"I reckon ye'll want to get back to writin'—and I must get back to work."

Donbrook smiled to himself. Her brother's own distinction!

Yet she stayed on, taut with constraint of the feeling that she must go.

"Let me read you what I've just written," he proposed, and arranged for her his choicest seat by propping pillows on the trunk against the foot-board of the bed.

He began in a droning yet vibrant voice. Now and then some phrase rasped his own aerial sense of floating with a bizarre note verging on comedy. He paused, looked at her, smiling.

"You see, this is the sort of stuff they don't buy in newspaper offices."

"Oh, go on," she reproached him, like one suddenly hurt. "There are lots of words I don't understand. But it kind of makes me understand ye, Cousin Chester. It sounds just like ye were tellin' of yerself in some way that's deeper than the meanin' of the words."

He read on until she herself interrupted.

"Ye were born down in this country—down in Tobin, weren't ye?"

"Yes," he replied. "But Tobin's spoiled now with two branch-line railroads, up from Atlanta and out from Asheville. When I was born, Tobin was a cluster of houses on a hill, in the fork of two clean rivers. There weren't any railroads. I was born in the old log house two miles out, known in Tobin as 'the old house'—with 'old' accented. Your grandma Barton was my great-great-aunt. All that makes us pretty close cousins—in spite of New York and—and newspapers."

"I can't count it up, whether we're third or fourth or fifth," she said. "But from the day ye got here on, it's seemed somehow like we were mighty close kinfolks."

"We're related through a series of mothers," he expounded. "My mother, and your mother, and her mother before her, all had a common ancestor. That makes us closer than if it were through male lines."

"We were all Macdonalds once if ye go back far enough," she reasoned, thinking deeply. "Grandma Barton was born a Macdonald. That Macdonald strain will come out, no matter how far ye get away from it."

They found endless similarities of tastes and disposition, all traceable to the Macdonalds. A voice called, making her start.

"Cla-ra!"

It was the voice of Wade.

"Mercy!" she cried, starting up. "It'll be pitch-dark in half an hour—and I ain't even started supper."

She hurried away.

ORDINARILY, voices from the lower log house did not reach to the upper. The roar of the creek shut them out—that roar which Donbrook had mistaken for driving rain-storm when he had awakened suddenly during his first night on Little White Wing.

To-day, however, he could hear Wade distinctly. The creek was falling lower in this first week of dry weather, and Wade's quiet voice was sharpened by irritation.

"Reckon we can expect supper long about bedtime."

Donbrook could not hear the girl's reply. Wade's retort revealed its nature.

"Forgettin'? I 'lowed as much. It's might' nigh as easy to forget to work as it is to be jest plain lazy. Easier, sometimes, I reckon."

Donbrook thought: "He likes me less and less. But I must stay here—until the frost, anyhow—throughout the winter, if I can. I must stay—I must!"

Wade must be made to like him. Was he not of the family, in the Macdonald line—and born near Tobin, only thirty miles to the south? The six dollars he paid Wade weekly for board was a godsend he felt sure. Clara had told him how the one thing it seemed impossible to get hold of was money—"cash" money—in the tightness since the war.

Donbrook could stay on here, finding himself, reconstructing himself, helping Wade, too—at an expense of about forty-five dollars a month, allowing for small extra expenditures. The six hundred dollars he had saved in four years of self-denial on the copy-desk of the most tight-fisted newspaper in New York could open the door to one year of freedom—one year for a soul to find its strength, to rise from the ashes of its ruins, from the dead embers of burnt-out ideals—withered dreams. One year, too, for forgetting——

But it was conceivable that Wade's antipathy might grow to a point where he

Clara could scarce suppress the signs of her happiness. Wade would not goad him into leaving. A happy year was before her.

would consign to hell the financial manna in his wilderness of poverty.

Donbrook surmised from things Clara had said that Wade was poor to-day because all his life, in his intolerant independence, he had done just that. Always he had found something unendurable about anything that eased his way.

It was as if he were jealous lest the mastery in which toil held his life should be challenged.

"We've never been able to keep tenants on the other clearin' up the creek," Clara had confided. "Much as Wade needs the money, if their ways don't exactly suit him, he makes 'em mad so as they'll leave. And nobody's ways ever exactly suit him. Nobody works hard enough."

IT WAS not Clara who came up to sit beside Donbrook's fire that night.

He had gone directly back to his cabin after the painful, too late supper, during which the younger sister had done her best to show gay and talkative spirits—as if nothing were wrong.

Lissie's share in the talk about the table had been her usual one. "Yes?" she would say to everything, with a questioning, upward inflection, while her blue eyes in her round, blurred face made their accustomed effort to look alive—to look as if anything mattered. "Yes?"

Lissie's "Yes?" was a masterpiece. Donbrook had been particularly impressed with it this evening. He poked his fire, added some of the driftwood he'd gathered along the creek. Her whole identity radiated in his thought from her manner of saying it.

She had had her compensations. There had been ever about her head the velvet shadows of the peaks; in her ears, the gurgle of the creek, the exaggeration of a brook's croon, rising betimes to the diapason of a mighty organ. While yet it was night she began the day for her little world, boiling the coffee, frying the salt bacon, shaping and baking the corn pone. Suffering, he surmised, was no less articulate in her empty, innocent eyes than in her soul. The soil had brewed merciful anesthetics. It had woven hashish vapors, muting the protests of her heart. Her child's brain had heard, but faintly.

And when you told her of the world beyond she was never to see or know, she nodded her head and answered, "Yes?" with an upward inflection of familiarity. It was as if she had long ago heard what you narrated—had eliminated it ere the telling. When you repeated your little tale of architecture, fabrics or people, of symphonies with fifty fiddles and as many horns, of Grecian temples with more pillars than there were posts on all six porches of old Jude Dankey's house in Stoversville, "Yes? That so?" came always the reply.

A concise, pleasant, vacant "Yes." You could translate it literally. "Yes," she seemed to imply; "I've known all you tell me—with satiety, without bitterness, in familiar preexistences which I have put behind me."

Donbrook mused, too, on the sinister thing in her life, symbolized by Grandma Barton, dead—and by Wade, who lived.

Clara had told him how Wade sometimes wakened overearly and, thinking it breakfast-getting time, would call Lissie at perhaps two o'clock in the morning. She would stagger from bed, fairly besotted with exhaustion, and kindle the fire. And while she tottered at the bread-baking and the meat-frying, Wade would discover his misconception of the time of day and call through the logs dividing the rooms:

"Git back to bed. Ye can sleep some more."

He never apologized for such mistakes, said Clara. He deemed that, in ordering Lissie back to bed, he rectified it.

A sharp, sudden gust, from the ridge-top blew Donbrook's door open and to again with a bang. For once he had closed it, even though there was no rain. The night had fallen exceptionally chill.

He rose and fixed a stone against it to hold it shut. He selected his book and moved his chair closer to the fire.

And then forthwith came the tapping on the logs outside his threshold. He mistook it for Clara and his eyes brightened.

"Come in!" he called. "I'm waiting for you."

But the visitor did not enter. He had to cross the floor and fling wide his door.

"It's me—this time," said Lissie. "I reckon ye don't expect no visit from me," she said, embarrassed, as she lumbered in. "I wouldn't 'a' come," she added, "if Wade could 'a' knowed. He's gone to Sneed's Holler, nearly to the county road, to git some hickory saplin' to make chair-bottoms out of the bark the next rainy day. The white hickory over thar's better'n the black hickory in the old Axe field."

Donbrook had to insist on her being seated.

"That's a real nice fire ye've built for yerself—ye're a-learnin' how, I reckon."

"What did you want to see me about, Lissie?" Donbrook asked her gently.

She sighed deeply. Never before had he heard from her so human a sound—as if from a heart still beating to the realities of life.

"It's—it's about Clara. I made her stay down there while I come up here."

"Clara?"

"Clara's told ye about it, maybe. I couldn't never marry 'cause pa and Grandma Barton didn't like the only man as ever wanted me. He went off to Montana—blamin' me, I reckon. Wade's a heap like pa. Clara can't never marry unless Wade decides to let her. She's been courted by quite several. Bash Miggons—son of the postmaster to Stoversville—he's been a-naggin' her to have him for years now. She don't want Bash, though. Wade ain't had to do no shooin' off in that quarter. But Wade—he's awful like pa and Grandma Barton—" She had made a tremendous effort. Her words gave out like something that, being wound up, stops suddenly.

"Go on," he encouraged.

"Wade don't know," she began again. "Not even Clara don't know—but I've got saved up nearly twelve hundred dollars, sellin' the wool I card and spin—tradin' yearlin's and calves and colts—sendin' eggs down to Stoversville—scrapin' together anyways I could for twenty years—since we first moved here." Once more she seemed to lose her thread. Her eyes sought his appealingly.

She seemed to be talking irrelevancies. He did not know what reply to make. He waited.

"I—I believe ye like Clara—like a real close cousin, anyhow. I know she likes ye—but it's all a-goin' to be spiled. Sooner or later, ye won't want to stay. Wade'll be a-makin' it somehow so as you'll be a-leavin'. I—I want ye to be friends with Wade."

"What do you mean, Lissie?"

"Clara told me how ye're fixed. Ye ain't rich, like most city folks—ye're pore—jest like we-uns."

HE ROSE and stood before the fire. He must be patient while she circled in narrowing rings about her point, whatever it might be.

"I've got to hurry—he might be back any minute. He's deep in debt—Wade, I mean. He took a lumberin' contract three years ago. He ain't got no business sense. He worked himself to the bone and fed and paid the loggin' men all summer. Me and Clara cooked for 'em—twelve big men, hungry three times a day—and the money Wade got in a lump from the Byrd Mills down to Junalusky was jest a thousand dollars less'n they cost him, with us cookin' fer nothin'! He mortgaged the farm. Then, last winter, when it looked like he might get some of it paid, he fell fifteen feet from the barn roof, where he was nailin' new shingles, one rainy mornin', to save the hay. We didn't find him till nigh dinner-time, when he didn't answer the whistle. He was lyin' jest like a dead man, and he lay two months, helpless. That set him back, and since then he's not had his old strength. I've wanted to let him know I've had the money, but something held me back—I think it must 'a' been Clara. If anything should happen to both of us—and she be left alone—I want to give the money to ye, and ye jest keep still and give it to Wade to raise the mortgage like it was yer own—let him think it's ye that's a-doin' it——"

"Lissie, you know I can't do that!"

"Don't, don't say ye can't! Wade's deep and grateful by nature. If ye done him a favor like that, he'd never forget it. I want Clara to be happy for jest one year—nobody can't take that away from her. I want ye to stay here a whole year like ye've planned—and ye can't do it unless ye find favor with Wade. Ye've got the Macdonald blood in ye—ye're proud—and Wade's sure to say or do some little something that'll drive ye away. Oh, promise you'll do it, Cousin Chester! Promise!"

Donbrook said laboringly,

"Are you sure it's a kindness to Clara for me to stay at all?"

"Kindness? She ain't never lived before, I tell ye. It's makin' her young. It's makin' her pretty."

"But you know, in the end, Lissie—I should have to go—even if I stayed out the year."

"That won't rob her of a year that'll be behind her—a year when she really lived—her with all that joy o' life in her nature. Maybe, too, ye can give her special readin' and writin' lessons and things like that, like ye proposed the other day. She can go out and be a teacher—if she's ever left alone. She can——"

A quick rap outside the threshold was followed by a voice from the darkness—Clara's voice.

"Lissie, Lissie! He's back at the barn. I seen his lantern a-twinklin'. He's like to be back to the house any minute."

Lissie made a frantic signal, implying that her mission must be kept inviolately secret, even from Clara. She had asked the younger sister to remain below while she talked to Cousin Chester. But she had not told her why.

They lingered at his fire for a moment, speaking commonplaces.

The interruption was a relief to Donbrook. He had been halted at the very verge of a pit toward which he was headed blindfold. The offer, in its simple guilelessness of generosity, had unveiled moral perplexities until now unsuspected. Lissie had made clear a baffling tangle, hourly creeping upon him with the spell of the mountains to which he had come to find himself.

He was glad when both of them were gone.

There must be nights of self-searching before he could trace out even the beginning of a solution—if, indeed, there was a solution.

DONBROOK sat long before his logs that night. The driftwood he had gathered burned too quickly. He brought in an armful of the small green logs cut by Wade and piled between the two cabins. The wood sang like a teakettle as the sap boiled from its cut ends. After a while they refused to burn. He turned them over, meaning to reset the fire, and withdrew his hand quickly in sharp pain. These raw sticks, gone seemingly cold, stung the finger-tips to a blister when you touched them.

It was like memories—old shames—half-forgotten memories—regrets—nauseas.

When he went to bed, he could not sleep. Clara had replenished his mattress with clean corn-shucks and fresh hay only the week before. Ordinarily, the fragrance lulled him, and the uneven, not oversoft pillowing was a stimulant to sleep. To-night it tortured his nerves like haircloth.

There was something in his past life he had deemed unnecessary to tell them, because, in his soaring toward rebirth, it had seemed so remote, so behind him, so utterly vanished.

But scorching heat might be in callow logs from which the flame had gone out——

Would Lissie have urged him to stay, would she have thrown out the selfless suggestion for the conciliation of her brother, if he had told her—as it had been on his lips to do when Clara interrupted?

He rose, half dressed himself against the cold and stepped outside the cabin doorway.

Late moonlight lay over the cove of Little White Wing, flicked by a capricious cloudiness which all day long had played cat and mouse with the threat of rain.

The scales were tipping in favor of a clear to-morrow—tipping ever so lightly—as if the weight of the most delicate mistral stirring from the top of White Wing Peak might turn the balance.

In pool-like spaces of clean, dark vacancy swam isolated stars of aggressive luster. So close that it seemed he might reach out and touch it across the roar of Little White Wing rose a blank, black flatness where trees, yet but half builded, decomposed the edging line of the silhouette. The cabin, with its open doorway of violently wavering lamplight, might have been cut from cardboard and pasted on a back drop. A hoarse whispering sounded in his ear. Some one had touched his elbow.

It was Wade.

"So ye're a-settin' up, too, are ye? Well, I reckon it was meant to be like that. I was a-goin' to talk with ye to-morrow, but I reckon it can be done better to-night with them two women asleep. I've been thinkin' things over—whether there was any need for us to have a summer boarder, with our quiet way of livin'—even a cousin. And jest as I was decidin' I had no right to make up my mind one way or t'other, along come this letter. I found it in the post-box when I went to get hickory bark. I didn't read it till I got to my room to go to bed."

"A letter?" repeated Donbrook.

"Come inside your room. I'll stand by while ye read it for yerself."

There was the exact lack of mercy in Wade's voice that Donbrook had known it would show should ever he come to some harsh decision.

They entered the cabin together. Donbrook shivered.

"It's cold in here—colder'n outside," observed Wade. "Reckon I'd better be nice like I was at first and build ye a good little fire—bein's as ye'll be a-leavin' so soon."

It sounded like the cruelest irony. Yet Wade promptly busied himself. In a miraculously brief interval of time the hearth was blazing. Wade used no matches—not even a strip of paper. He raked the ashes together with his hand and cut little shavings from a stick with his penknife. Then he blew twice or thrice on coals which had glimmered into life as if at his command.

Donbrook watched him with the fascination under which a person bound hand and foot might watch a deliberate formality preceding his own burning at the stake.

WHEN the blaze filled all the cabin with leaping ruddiness, Wade rose from his squatting posture on the hearth. He drew the letter from his hip-pocket, out of which it had been projecting all the while, with part of the inscription plainly visible to Donbrook's eye. He had recognized the handwriting.

In his stupor he had no conjecture as to how or why that writer should trace him here after forgetting his existence during four years of entire accessibility on a metropolitan newspaper.

There was irony in that, too. He had only to try to lose himself, to hide away with his ideals and his dreams, when forthwith the woman had searched him out, discovered even the remote cousins with whom he had sought sanctuary. It was like her.

He read the letter and handed it back.

"The reading was hardly necessary," he said. "I could have just about guessed what she would write to you—granted she knew of your existence—knew what your good will must mean to me."

"I don't want to insult ye, but——"

"But?"

"Ye've been a-posin' in sheep's clothin'," said Wade. "Ye let on that she was dead."

"There was no particular deception in that," replied Donbrook. "She was so utterly dead to me."

"Ye never so much as mentioned havin' a son."

"The law gave the boy to me absolutely," said Donbrook. "But the woman's mother is a good woman—and a lonely one. She lives on a little farm in Vermont with the child. It was safe. The child's own mother would not see him often. She could never concentrate on him long enough to harm him."

"We-uns here in the mountains," said Wade, "don't take so much stock in them there city divorces. A married man's a married man. Besides all that—her side of the tale ain't like yourn. She says here that ye deserted 'em both, that ye ain't never done nothin' toward their support, that ye'll let 'em starve—if it comes to that."

Donbrook's mouth had set. What was the use? Knowing her as he did, he could make out the probable course of recent events prompting the letter—diminishing luck in her butterfly work in the theatre—the well-remembered tawdry dramatic instinct that always capitalized passing misfortunes into sounding recriminations. To berate anything she could at such times was an *hors-d'œuvre* in her gluttony of life. Whatever mystery the situation held, it was not there.

Once more, what was the use? Something in him loathed himself even for inferences regarding her made to Wade already—in a first outleaping protest at the injustice. Were he to reason logically with this mountaineer—reason and prove how, in every syllable, her letter was fundamentally a lie, the feat would but increase Wade's aversion. It would increase his own aversion for himself.

The stoic in Wade would deem his fight for a clean title against the accusation of a woman and a mother more contemptible than the traits they claimed to prove. The stoic in himself fully comprehended.

"Well?" Wade was waiting.

From depths profounder than any test in all his life behind him came Donbrook's sigh.

"I'll go," he said. "I was wondering already whether I must not go."

But it was a death sentence upon himself.

When he did go, the last strained rallying of will to scale the farthest heights within his reach would be shattered. His clambering feet and hands would slide back, strained and maimed. In the depths of a dead lake, the faint-heard bell, sounding its silvery carillon from peaks bathed in far-visioned beckoning blue, would be sunken. Frogs would croak over the cracked tone, muted in ooze and sand and slime.

Wade's manner altered, softening a little.

"One thing I axe of ye—cousin. Don't leave us too sudden-like. Don't let Clara think I done it. Sometimes I feel as if she was a-layin' by a store of little grudges agin me as it is. They don't do no good in a family that's shrunk down to jest three, a-hangin' together, way off from everybody. Leave gradual-like. I axe it of ye—cousin."

The appeal had its spark of comfort, of compensation for Donbrook. This upright mountaineer, with the character of granite, who had cheated no man, who had beggared himself paying debts another would have eluded, who guarded the fading clan of the old Scotch-Irish stock like some ancient Roman holding a narrow mountain pass against an encroaching world—this Spartan who would defy blackest destiny from the rack—even he deemed the stranger in his house worthy the asking of a favor. Even he had sensed the danger of a too crucial resentment in a sister. He had no realization of how he groveled. But Donbrook knew.

"It shall be as you wish it to be in every way," he said. "I tell you again, I was debating on my going when you found me to-night."

"I promise, in turn, not to blacken ye to her," said Wade. "See!"

With a quick, intolerant gesture, he flung the letter he had asked Donbrook to read into the fire. It blazed with an outlicking red like brimstone and vanished in an instant. Not even a film of charred ash recorded it.

Donbrook thought, "That, also, is well—since your object is to keep yourself unsullied in your sister's eyes."

A smile played faintly on his drawn face. Wade knitted his brows. Something in Donbrook's smile reached him.

"I'm honest about it," he said. "I don't want her to think hard on ye. That wouldn't do no good, neither."

Donbrook nodded.

"It wouldn't—unless I myself could make her think hard of me. In that case, it might."

"I leave all that to ye," said Wade. "Ye'll be here now maybe a week more. Five or six days, anyhow. Everything gradual-like."

"Five or six days more," repeated Donbrook, in the dead tone of one memorizing a lesson. To himself he said, "You compliment me more than I would have thought possible." And the thought, reflecting itself again in his smile, made Wade uneasy. The mountain farmer made his retreat awkwardly.

Donbrook followed him outside the cabin.

The night was quieting. Spring moved in the moonlight, dim, trailing to its perfumes. Only five or six days left him.

HE HAD witnessed, thus far, the beginning of the pageant along White Wing—heading the processional a coppery and golden maple by the spring-house—a precocious flaunt, jocularly autumnal, like a waggish girl donning the finery of a middle-aged matron. Then the snowy drifting of the service trees—such a persistent bridal evocation, lasting almost since Wade's team and wagon had brought him across the saddle-pass of Atoah, from Stoversville, a month ago.

The bellwood's tinkle of pendent gossamer was following close on the service, and both were dimming before the encroachment of the dogwood blossoms, still a wan green of low visibility but bleachening day by day above his cabin, along the black line of woods where the snake fence dangled, as if ready to fall when quickening ecstacies should snap its thread.

Accompanying all this had been the silent fluttering of white and blue violets everywhere from the ground, the alighting of scarlet cup like carnivorous butterflies in the open meadows, the hand-flung largess of a myriad nameless little scented flowers.

Only five or six days more—a week at most!

He would miss even the foaming float of the dogwood at its climax, as it rolled with the blinding sumptuousness of an avalanche across millions of new leaves weaving their lavender mists.

And there was to be, but not for him, the mountain-laurel, following the azalea—grottoes of the most evanescent coral ever dreamed—gardens of a Japanese Klingsor—pink sea-caves, meet to the undulance of rose-white geishas turned mermaids, floating, sporting in the liquid, lethargic ambience—the climax of the mountain bacchanal.

And then—but not for him!—the finale of spring's ritual, while the music of the motley receded, wafting back—the rhododendron blooms—candelabra held aloft by the last lush-stepping acolyte of revels deafeningly delicate!

And Clara?

He stifled the sigh that all but shuddered through him. He might have known. It was but the set way of the thing called "living."

SHE left her garden-hoeing next morning to walk with him to the post-box. It was three miles distant. The mail-boy from Stoversville passed this box, usually on muleback, collecting or leaving letters if there happened to be any. Little White Wing Valley was twelve miles away from the town, but its postal designation was: "Stoversville, N. C., R. F. D. Route 4."

There was a steep trail over the ridge which cut the distance in half. But its dizzy climb and plunge were feats which took away the breath and forbade conversation. Clara and Chester took the little used old logging-road instead. It followed the windings of the creek—but high above—trailing languidly along the mountainsides, asserting a mild, mellow patience with the difficulties it encountered, ever ready for compromise, turning back upon itself, eating its own threats, so to speak, yet winning out and arriving at the broad county highway against odds of steepness, unyielding stone and jutting crag.

Finely meshed odors of early spring, playing over it, were largely negative in the great ozonic freshness which swallowed them up. Now and then in the ancient cuts some pit of mossy earth hoarded the scent of arbutus. The early-blooming service, which had grown whiter in the bygone week, was often dimming now into a paleness that glimmered like the passing of a ghost among lacy twigs. Across the ravine of White Wing, whenever the road broke into the open, splotches on the gaunt beshadowed steeps were like marks from a giant thumb dipped in bright-green paint. Donbrook was reminded of certain camouflages on vast gray-black battle-ships—loose green daubs flung by a coarse bristle brush.

An etched ocean of morning sounds—birds reechoing each other against the Little White Wing, which far below them seemed to have subdued its hubbub to the trickling of a rill—abashed by the unfearing openness of the wine-golden day.

It seemed almost impossible to begin, here and now, his campaign of preparation for his departure—something that must be made to seem natural to her, that must give her no shock, as little disappointment, as little pain, if pain it must be, as might be. The morning was too perfect. Her eyes shone. Her slate-blue gown was festive with touches of unconscious coquetry.

When he had proposed the walk for the mail, she had rushed into the house from her hoeing and emerged wearing the tan shoes never worn before save when they had preaching at the schoolhouse on Panther Creek every fourth Sunday. She had drawn round her waist a belt of ribbon into which she had pricked some of the service blossoms gathered yesterday.

At the top of the first winding ascent she had stopped and broken off a twig of young budded maple to add to these.

"White flowers need something to set 'em off against this blue," she explained. "Them maple sprouts are the only thing in the woods that show any live color—till the wild honeysuckle sets to bloomin'."

"Wild honeysuckle" was the local name for the azalea, which would lick out in flame when the season should be more advanced—orange and blood-red and yellow, running from warm to pale, in great livid splotches, all over the mountainsides.

That was one of the things he had not looked upon since childhood, and was perhaps not to see again.

Where the road rounded the last spur in sunny openness before its descent she arrested the monologue of her blithe talk to break an overhanging bough of wild crab-apple coming into blossom before its time.

She was telling him once more of the old log house on the Santeetlah, set in the garden her mother made and tended. This childhood, plainly a happy one, was something of which she never wearied. It was clearer and clearer to Donbrook why Lissie longed to have him stay out his year. Lissie understood Clara's faculty for living all her joys over and over again.

"When it comes summer, and the rains have stopped, and my beans and onions are all set," she ran on, "we'll take two or three days off and go over to the old Santeetlah place. I've always wanted Wade to take me back sometime, but he puts off everything, year after year. Nothing need hinder this summer—with ye here to go with me. It's a lot of hard climbing, both goin' and comin'—but we'll take all day each way. The Hawkins are a-livin' there now. They'll be right much glad to see us and keep us overnight. They say the place is all run down and the garden gone—but it'll be satisfyin', somehow, to see it once more. Ye'd like to go now—maybe?"

"I'd like to—yes, Clara—you know that without asking me—but——"

Her face fell. She missed in him the eagerness she had so confidently expected.

"Maybe, though, ye mightn't want to walk so long and hard. There's lots of easier places we can go to, once it's straight dry weather—just as pretty, maybe."

"It's not the weather—or the walking. I don't get half enough of either. I'm writing much too much—while all these marvels of beauty slip by me—so fast they take my breath. But—has it ever occurred to you, Clara?—I might not be able to stay here. Things might happen—in the North, you know—things connected with my work—business affairs——"

He could see the light in her soul go dark.

"Oh!" she said, clutching the flowers at her waist and reloosening her fingers helplessly. "Ye mustn't go—no matter what happens!"

"But you yourself have realized—haven't you?—little things might happen—many things. Wade might need the cabin, for instance, for the hands he'll have to hire if he takes on another lumber contract. He spoke of it yesterday."

The girl gulped. Then she smiled bravely.

"I know he did. I was right on the point of threatenin' him about it. I was goin' to tell him Lissie and me would both leave before we'd let him put all that work on us again—cookin' and washin' for eight or ten men—and nothin' but more debt in the end. I was goin' to scare him. I'd be bluffin' a little about Lissie—she'd never leave him if he put brandin'-irons to her feet to spur her to work faster. But I ain't Lissie. I *would!*

"Or, anyhow," she added, feeling she had gone a little far, "I'm peart enough to make him believe I would. But listen, Cousin Chester; Wade didn't mean one word of what he was a-sayin'. He threatens another lumber contract whenever he feels discouraged and out o' sorts. And when he got up this mornin' it was all gone. He was gentler than he's been since before he got the fall from the barn roof. He spoke kindly of ye, too, Cousin Chester. Mark my word—he's goin' to end up by likin' ye as much as Lissie and me. Lissie said so, too—last night in the night. Ye'd end up by winnin' Wade over, she said—and when Lissie forms an opinion, it's because she knows why. She don't form them often."

He could not argue the subject further. Her faith was too insistent. He had exhausted the strength of his will for that day. To-morrow he would have to begin where he had left off.

Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. He brushed them away.

"It's gettin' warm as summer," she said, noting the gesture.

THE old road crossed the creek at the exact point where it turned into the highway. Teams had to ford the stream. But there was an ample, easy foot-log, hewn flat. Four rural-delivery boxes stood at its farther end, pigeon-cotes, balanced on narrow poles, like squat hydrocephalic sentinels standing at attention. One of the pigeon-cotes bore the name of McKenna.

Clara peered into it.

"Bud Trull ain't been along this mornin' yet," she said. "Them mule-tracks is yesterday's."

They sat waiting on the bank of Little White Wing, their feet dangling on the stones.

A little spurt of dust in the distance and the leisurely muffled sound of hoofs heralded the approach of the mail.

But Bud Trull was not on duty to-day. A woman rode astride a horse with the mail-bags flung in front of her. She wore a khaki skirt, adjusted but not divided. A soldier's overseas cap was set coquettishly on her befrizzed hair. Her manner was resolutely debonair, her face sharp-nosed, prying, bereft of freshness, yet not devoid of force. There was a sharp cast in one of her eyes and a rather malicious light in both.

Clara had recognized her the instant her horse had turned the curve where the highway rounded an old Cherokee Indian field.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, but without evidence of especial pleasure. "If it ain't Mrs. Miggons—deliverin' the White Wing mail herself! Bud must be on a drunk."

"Mrs. Miggons?"

"The wife of the postmaster over to Stoversville. I thought jest everybody knowed *her*."

MRS. MIGGONS had something for them both—a bulky parcel-post package for Clara, a letter for Donbrook. She eyed them with intensive scrutiny as she made the delivery, following a not overly cordial exchange of "Howdy's" between herself an Clara.

Eying them thus, with the baneful rigidity of her cast eye somehow refusing to be jocular, she essayed to jest with Clara with the privileged familiarity of old-acquaintanceship.

"Havin' a good time as I've interrupted?" she joshed. "Three mile away from home—and home itself at the jumpin'-off place in Hepsidam's wilderness!"

Clara went very pink under her tan.

"Meet my cousin, Mrs. Miggons. My cousin — Mr. Chester Donbrook — from New York."

The self-appointed deputy for Bud Trull accepted the introduction with a nod that refused to be impressed and without proffering her hand.

"Oh, ye can't tell me anything about them city fellers." Mrs. Miggons reined her horse back into the county road and spoke over her shoulder. "I was mighty nigh raised in a city myself, Cousin Donbrook! Not all of us down hereabouts is hill-bills!"

Her horse resumed its interrupted jog. She clucked to it and added something neither of them could quite catch with heightened hilarity.

"Oh, what I don't know about him!" she called back.

A sharp rise where the trees began blotted out Mrs. Miggons and her mail-sacks. Clara shook her head.

"She's an awful woman, I believe. What Leslie Miggons ever saw in her! And him a widower with grown-up sons!"

"I seem to have heard of one of the sons," teased Donbrook. "They call him 'Bash'—don't they—an occasional caller at Little White Wing farm?"

"Now, Cousin Chester," she implored, "don't *ye* start up that nonsense. He won't be a-callin' no more—that I can say—and could 'a' said long afore you—" She caught herself, reddening painfully. "I never wanted nothin' by the name of Miggons!" she snapped out.

"I'll be good," promised Donbrook, still smiling.

Some recollection forced the girl's embarassment into the background.

"But that stepmother's been the worst influence that ever happened in them boys' lives—or in all Stoversville, for that matter. Just one party after another at the old home where their own good Christian mother died only four years ago —with the moonshine corn whisky passed round in gourds out at their spring-house—and if she don't outright help 'em at it, she's at no pains, anyhow, to hinder. She don't like any of us McKennas. Wade once panned her out good and plenty about lettin' the Stoversville boys git drunk at her dances. Her talk must 'a' turned a lot of folks against Wade."

"There I'm sure you're wrong," said Donbrook. "Wade has the respect of every man, woman and child within a fifty-mile radius of his farm. I learned all about that—that night the mail-hack brought me into Stoversville. Every man speaks of his straightforwardness—his truth, uprightness and honor."

She glowed at the praise.

"Oh it's good to hear ye a-sayin' that! I'm so glad ye don't dislike Wade—so glad!"

"You're forgetting your parcel-post bundle," he reminded her.

"And ye yer letter."

He half averted his face, seeming to be watching a marvelous scarlet bird with coal-black wings that alighted for an instant in the old Indian field, like an ignited brand flung from an unseen hand.

His letter was directed in the ominous writing which had projected from Wade's pocket as he squatted to build the fire.

"Let's open the bundle," he proposed, playing at boyishness, exaggerating his eagerness.

"Ye're just like me," she laughed. "I love to open 'em. I never want to wait."

He cut the knotted string with his penknife. Foldings of slate-blue linen met their eyes. The sender had enclosed a note, in ignorance or indifference of postal regulations.

"Ye read it to me," she suggested. "Ye know how slow us mountain folks are when we figger out handwritin' we're not used to."

He read aloud, deciphering the trembling, elongated scrawl so slowly that elimination was easy. The words he read aloud were:

"Dear Clara McKenna:

"I'm sending you a blue-linen gown which belonged to my daughter. They tell me you're a pretty girl. I hope you will like it, my dear, and that it will add a detail of further content in what must be a happy summer in your life. A lonely old woman wishes you——"

He paused, omitting phrases in which she coupled Clara's name with his own.

" 'Wishes you joy and prosperity,' " he read on, and stopped again. "It's signed 'Mrs. Evelyn Markham,' " he concluded, "with a parenthesis round the 'Mrs.' " His hand crumpled the note, as if absently. "My wife's mother," he added.

She was deeply moved.

"Yer dead wife! And this was one of her pretty dresses—and ye must 'a' wrote her mother to send it to me. That was mighty good of ye, Cousin Chester."

He was at a total loss. Supplementing the dull ache that had been recurrent in his brain since the interview with Wade before dawn, here was more of the baffling, hounding mystery.

Not only had they traced him here—they knew of Wade—knew, it would seem, of stirrings in the heart of this girl that he had never until yesternight admitted to his own innermost consciousness.

The aging woman who kept his boy meant him no harm. She was but a duped instrument of torture in the hands of the other.

There is a swift-winged, iridescent insect that is agile at the business of sudden darting stings. It is called the gadfly. Once the woman who had borne his name and borne him a child had wrung that epithet from him.

How she made him eat the word!

Clara was repeating:

"So wonderful kind of ye, Cousin Chester! I've always wanted to own just one real city dress. And ye even wrote her about my color a-bein' this soft kind of faded slate-blue—though I'd never known it myself until ye told me——"

"No—no!" he broke in fiercely. "Make no mistake—I didn't write that to her. The color is just a coincidence. Life's full of them—full of all manner of strange things!"

"Ye've gone and mussed her letter all up," she chided. "And I want to keep it. Poor old woman—all her children married and gone, or dead, I reckon—like ourn!"

"Will you let me hold this note, Clara?" he asked her. "Not long. Just until tomorrow—or next day. Then you can have it back—to keep as a souvenir."

She could conceive nothing amiss in any suggestion which came from him.

"When ye give it back, I'll lay it away," she murmured, "among the things I treasure."

She had forgotten altogether that other letter which he had thrust unread into his flannel shirt.

"Suppose we take the short trail," he suggested, "and hurry home—so that you can try on the dress."

CROSSING by the short trail was his inspiration. Its steepness compelled silence. He let her lead the way, lest unwittingly in his distraction he might hurry her.

The climb, precipitous as a tilted ladder, taxed her strength. They had to sit and rest at the top of the ridge.

Then she remembered what he prayed she would keep forgetting.

"Why not read *yer* letter now," she asked him.

"Something tells me it isn't going to be a pleasant letter," he replied. "That's why I don't read it—with you looking on."

"Then I won't watch ye," she returned incorrigibly. "I'll go over to that spring and get a drink—ye can read while my back is turned."

She moved away toward the spring which gushed from under a boulder, a hundred feet off the trail.

He drew the letter from his shirt. She lingered at the spring long enough to give him plenty of time.

When she returned, he put a flat question to her.

"This postmaster's second wife," he began, "this Mrs. Miggons—is there anything actually dangerous about her, Clara? I mean, is she capable of anything definitely treacherous or malicious?"

"I don't know—" hesitated the girl. "I wouldn't put her above it."

She regarded the subject as hardly worth discussion. Yet she herself harked back to it as they started the downward homestretch.

"Old Thed Miggons met her when he took a trip down to Atlanta. She claims to 'a' been a high-paid telephone operator, or something fine like that. But she don't say so much about her origins before she went there. She comes from a whisky-makin' set back of Cheohy."

"I see."

Again the path, now down-dropping, was too steep for talking. They could only call out little breathless monosyllables to each other. They slipped and balanced and ran. The woods thinned suddenly to their right, and far below them glimmered the green of Wade's clearing on Little White Wing. They had the sense of eagles, poised awing, and circling at their own free pleasure toward the earth.

The gleam of the valley beckoned, flickering in and out. They seemed to dally with it. They seemed lords of levitation.

In the exhilaration of speed, of wide-flung skyey spaces linked but not fettered in chained blue peaks, the weight lifted from the soul of the man. The winds were a wine upwelling beneath him. The tightening clutch of his sense of loss—of something nearly gained and now slipping, slipping from a wearied, loosening grip—he felt it no more.

The day, the hour, this girl, these mountains—they were the realities of the moment, shutting out whatever had been or was yet to be. He flung his soul to the mountain winds, his exaltations stinging its roar about his ears, as bubbles sting the liquid in a vat of golden amber.

"It's like soaring!" he called out to her as she plunged, laughing, below and beyond him. "Like soaring! Only—we do it downward, instead of up!"

THEY reached the house as Lissie set the midday dinner on the table. Wade had gone way over Tellico way, she told them, rounding in some stray yearlings for the spring branding. He would not be back before night.

They had never eaten so animated a meal together. When Lissie was clearing away the dishes, Clara shut herself in the room on the other side of the roofed opening dividing the cabin. In a little while she called merrily to her sister.

Their boarder smoked outside for half an hour in the shadow of the chimney. Then she came out wearing the slate-blue linen, followed by Lissie.

It looked awkward upon her. He tried to assure her how becoming it was. But the enthusiasm he had shown about her old faded blue cotton was lacking. She knew it. The finery bedraggled her.

Sensing the difference in his tone, she drooped yet more in the unacclimated daintiness.

"I don't feel right in it," she said. "Such things ain't meant for ignoramuses like us, I reckon."

"Clara, I'd be ashamed!" protested Lissie. "It looks jest grand."

The artist in Donbrook perceived what was wrong.

"You must try to feel a little artificial for that sort of thing," he explained. "You must strut a bit—'put on airs,' as you would say. Clothes of that type compel you to. They simply eat you up if you don't."

He drew her inside to the splotched looking-glass of her bureau. He wound the black satin which encased the high outstanding collar of the gown closer about her neck. He gripped her shoulders like a sculptor shaping his clay. She lifted her chin.

"Oh, I begin to see!" she cried; and there woke within her the spark of the actress which is in nearly every woman and which had lain dormant until this instant of her life.

All the lines of her body as she stood

underwent some strange transmutation. It was magical—nearly uncanny. It half frightened him.

"Am I a-shapin' up to it right—*now?*" she asked.

He would not have dared show sign of the contradictory emotions struck from him by the pictures she evoked—as if at the wand of a conjurer.

"That's the idea," he said merely. "You're catching on."

She was now gaily in the spirit. She snatched from a nail her old working-hat—her flapping farmer's straw. It was all but lichened with the discoloration of many rains. Its cotton band had long ago been removed. For a while her swift fingers were busy, shaping, pinching, adjusting, cocking up one side of the broad rim, folding down another. From somewhere in the pell-mell of the top bureau drawer she produced a tattered mass of slate-blue cotton veiling and crushed and wound and turned its frayed ends under about the crown. She adjusted the resculptured head-gear above her low-hanging black hair, poising her head before the mirror, shifted its angles and contours, putting in pins here, taking them out there. In a flash she had turned, facing Lissie and Chester, holding her pose.

"Now!" she announced—like one raising a curtain on herself.

"You little fashion-plate!" gasped Donbrook. "You little peacock!"

Never could he have dreamed such a miracle. The twilight of the log room effaced details that might have been flaws in the illusion. Here, caught for an instant by some dormant intelligence suddenly set free within her, the very sprite of fashion fluttered captive—charm, nonchalance, pretty vanity.

"A person 'ud swear ye'd stepped right out of one of them style-pictures," declared Lissie.

The girl made a little gesture of loosening something from the tips of her curved fingers. She blew on them lightly with her lips.

"Shoo!" she addressed the imaginary butterfly. "Now he's gone. Ye and Lissie can't run after him fast enough to catch him. Get back to yer writin', Cousin Chester. I've got to put on my old cotton skirt and finish my day's hoein'."

Clara had not erred in deeming that her brother had somehow relented toward Chester.

Having pronounced sentence irrevocably, Wade's confidence in the loyalty with which the condemned would carry it out never faltered. After all, the old Macdonald blood was in this stranger-cousin's veins. The Macdonalds never did things sneakily.

It was characteristic of the mountain farmer that he saw no inconsistency in the attitude. He was not equal to self-scrutiny of all the complexes which made him wish the fellow gone—as he wished nearly everybody gone. He did not know that embedded in his nature was an insular strain. It would have suited him had the forests about his clearing been unnavigable oceans.

WHEN he returned for supper after his long, invigorating day away from the plow in the Tellico heights, he was almost gracious. He pressed Donbrook to linger by the household fire. He questioned him about the way men earned a living on a great city newspaper. He was astounded to learn that many dailies issued a fresh edition every hour.

"Well I'll be doggoned!" he marveled. "I thought writin' was lazy work."

Clara could scarce suppress the signs of her happiness. Things were working out right, after all. Wade would not goad him into leaving. A happy year was before her. She did not need to think of after that.

When Donbrook rose to leave them, he said to Wade:

"Out at my cabin is something I'd like to show you. The girls aren't invited this time. I'm sorry."

"Girls!" derided Clara. "Mighty old girls!"

Wade followed him out.

"He's not makin' fun of us," Clara explained to Lissie. "He's jest a big boy."

"I know," nodded Lissie, steadily knitting a woolen sock in the mingled flicker of the fire and the smoky lamp. "Jest like a child."

In the privacy of the upper cabin, Donbrook showed Wade the letter from his one-time wife, delivered that morning by Mrs. Miggons. It was dated three days after the one Wade had received a day earlier. But irregularities were customary in Stoversville rural deliveries.

Wade studied out the letter for himself. He was a laborious reader. To Donbrook it seemed an eternity ere he had it deciphered, page by page.

He handed it back in silence, sat chewing his tobacco quid, gazing stubbornly at the fireplace.

"I git the drift," he finally commented. "But I can't see as there's aught in it to change the decision reached by ye and me this mornin' afore daylight."

"That I did not expect," said Donbrook.

Mechanically he looked at the sheets Wade had returned to him, staring at their meaningless, headlong loquacity. She had written:

DEAR CHESTER:

Only three days ago I was trying to injure you. Since then things have broken better for me, and I'm sorry. Show your new-found cousins this letter. Doubtless it will wipe out any little harm my bad humor may have done you. I found your forwarding address at your newspaper and wrote to the Stoversville postmaster for all particulars. That started a brisk little correspondence with the postmaster's wife, who's evidently bored and ready for distractions. She seems to know all the landscape of that God-awful desert of Ishmael. In my mind's eye are her life-sized portraits of the three yokel McKennas, including the one who has fascinated you—and of you, dwelling in their midst—playing at hermit—with consolation prizes.

Nevertheless, old dear, I'm sorry I was moved to try to queer you with the ogre of the bunch. Things were black for me at the time—as it happened—I had been weeks in the home hole, without an engagement. The boy was a pest—like other male five-year-olds. Mamma had been ill. She's getting fundamentally feebler. My mood was black. Blue devils in me tempted me to start something. If you had money for vacationing, I doped it out, I'd see what was doing.

But in less than a day after I wrote came the telegram I'd stopped hoping for. It summoned me to blessed old New York, where yesterday I was married to the man I'd begun to suspect of trying to jilt me. At the city hall—quite informally! Naturally, being quite blissfully happy, and facing a prosperous season in vaudeville with my new husband, I felt sorry I'd been tempted to "gadfly" you, just a bit—poor old unlucky dear!

Tell your cousins not to mind. You're all right. Tell 'em I said so.

THE legalized name she signed also meant nothing. Donbrook tore the letter across. Wade stopped his arm as he was about to throw it into the fire.

"It don't change nothin' one way nor t'other," he said. "But don't burn it."

"As you wish."

"The outstandin' facts remain the same. Ye encouraged us in thinkin' she was dead—at least, ye didn't tell us no better. And ye never once mentioned havin' a son."

Donbrook answered him wearily. Simple as was the explanation, why should he expect the other to understand?

"It's just that I make it a rule not to talk of my past marriage at all," he said. "Probably I would have confided the facts to you in due time—if I came to feel there was any need to do so—or any harm in leaving it undone."

"Have ye told her yet?"

It was significant that Wade did not speak in the plural and that he left the name unuttered.

"Not yet. With only a few days left me here, I—I put it off."

"Ye'll tell her afore ye go, though?"

"Before I go, yes. But I may as well tell you now, Wade—when I do tell her, she shall be made to understand—at least to the point where she'll do me no injustice. I'm not hero enough to coach her in condemning me—even though it serve your purpose in wishing me gone—from her good will as well as her life."

Wade made a sound between a sullen grunt and a clearing of his throat.

"And don't deceive yourself further," Donbrook went on, "as to why you want me gone. It is not because I am undesirable—as you've tried to make yourself believe. It is because you want to go on ruling your little island kingdom with no outside influence—no interruption. A strange footprint on any sandy shoal of Little White Wing frightens you like a specter."

"Ye're not wrong thar," said Wade. "Clara's mighty susceptible to all kinds of notions that ain't no use to her. One year of bein' eddicated by ye, or anybody else, and she'll begin pinin' to bust harness. No—I don't see no call to change our understandin' this mornin'."

Wade's voice had gathered vindictiveness. The harshness spent itself. He rose, his face relaxing.

"But I thank ye ag'in for bein' willin' to leave gradual, of yer own free will, and without makin' any hard feelin's in any quarter. Good-night—Cousin Chester."

It was the first time he had extended his powerful right hand since the first days after Chester's arrival—when enthusiasm for a boarder who happened to be a relative was contagious in all the household.

"Good-night, Cousin Wade."

Wade was muttering to himself as he descended the incline in the outside darkness. "Every inch a Macdonald! It crops out in all of us to the last generation."

A DEEP languor was upon Chester. He mistook it for sheer drowsiness and went to bed about the time the lights ceased to twinkle from the lower cabin.

He could not sleep—as so often these nights. He got up again and, standing by the rail fence dangling with the dimness of phosphorus down to his door, watched the febrile radiance behind the flat blank mountain bulk in front of him, its blunt peak jagged like the edge of a saw. Out of this crenelation in perhaps an hour would rise a decaying moon—like some clenched fist of Death conjured of cumulative, amorphous wraiths.

Sweeping silences of vast sonority enfolded the sense of being—ghosts of harmonies that were an exorcism to concrete audibility. Identity receded, not with alternate surgings and faintness, as in moments of ultimate joy or despair, but with a swift, muffled efficiency—as if at the command of some pervasive will from which it could not be articulated. The atom of consciousness made no more resistance than would a day-blooming flower before the shriveling of its petals at night.

He drowsed heavily. A rail on which he leaned cracked sharply beneath his weight.

Did he dream? Or did he fancy he heard somewhere a faint clicking—like an echo? It did not matter.

He staggered back to the cabin, fell across the bed without removing the clothes he had drawn on. Dreamless sleep descended—the boon and the balm he had sought.

A brief flash, he knew not how long, of merciful utter blankness——

The awakening was abrupt as a shudder—and to no dream. Some one was touching his face with fingers grown icy cold. But tenderly. At least, it was no enemy clutching for his throat.

He heard Clara's breath coming as if she struggled to silence it. He sprang to a sitting posture. She leaned above him, outlined against the chalky dimness at his open door.

"Oh, Cousin Chester—are ye wide enough awake?"

She whispered hoarsely, panting.

"There's a little pit underneath this cabin floor. I've pried loose the plank. Hide there—oh, hide there—quick!"

"What's wrong?" he asked, touching her elbow to stay the trembling of her hand.

"Just a potato-cellar—but, oh, hide there—quick—quick, Cousin Chester!"

"But what is wrong—what is wrong?"

"O God—it's jest a-losin' time to tell ye *now!* Mrs. Miggons—her three stepsons, I mean—wearin' masks—and her two brothers from over in Cheoy—and some other riffraff they've gathered in—they're down by the creek—cowards—in spite of the whisky they make and are drunk on! Wade's holdin' them off at the gate with his gun. They're askin' for ye. Oh, hide in here—don't stumble—I'll put back the plank—oh please, please, Cousin Chester! I'll go back and tell 'em ye're gone—that ye left to-night——"

"Me? Crawl into that hole? Like a scared rat?"

His rebuke was scathing. He did not raise his voice, but he was at no pains to lower it.

And now above the creek he could distinctly hear Wade's expostulation, tense and high.

He lighted his lamp deliberately.

"Cousin Chester—with all my heart—with all my soul I beg ye—don't, don't go down there! Ye don't own a weapon and there's a dozen of 'em—hesitatin' jest what devilment they want to do. Wade's holdin' 'em at bay—ye'd be only a target. They've got enough sense in their drunken brains not to shoot at Wade. We've got another rifle, but Lissie's took it. She's afraid somebody'll get killed, I reckon——"

He flung the girl off. He plunged down the incline. She was at his side as swiftly, clutching at his arm. He stopped an instant, in spite of himself, wincing at the pain. It was as if live, taut wires communicated her frantic will in the grip of her slender fingers.

"I ask ye to go back there and hide—if not for me, then for Wade—for Lissie—for all of us—to keep anything from happenin' to anybody—to keep anybody from havin' to shoot!"

"You ask too much," he said bitterly. "It's a family trait."

In instant remorse he could have bitten out his tongue.

"Dear—dear heart—" he pleaded. "I didn't mean that."

Somehow, in the flicker of an eyelash, that was yet as an eternity of sweetness strained from blurrings of pain, his arms were about her—his lips found hers. Her own arms, which had sought to hold him, back fell limp. She drank his long kiss as starved soil drinks rain.

A MOMENT more and he stood erect beside Wade's gaunt frame in the open space where the creek road turned in at the swinging gate.

It was slightly ajar. Wade held the opening with his rifle. The dozen masked men were grouped close in the roadway—seething but undecided, like a black cluster of tumbling earth-beetles.

"And, I tell ye ag'in, it's goin' to mean death to somebody if ye keep on!" Wade exhorted. "I'll shoot the first man down as moves a foot from where you-all's a-standin' full of yer own corn liquor and the hell that's been fed ye from out the mouth of a lyin' woman."

"That's him—there he is!"

One of the mob cried it out as Chester stood like one risen from the blank earth before their blinking eyes.

Donbrook did not even hear.

In his ear rang only the vibrance of the other voice which held the gate defending him—the voice of the mountain farmer who was his cousin through the Macdonalds.

Another spoke.

"We don't want to harm *ye* none, Wade—ye nor none of yourn. But we do want him—down here a-spyin' fer them newspapers and the government—gittin' his evidence ag'in us free mountain folks fer moonshinin' and bootleggin'. He ain't worth defendin', Wade. We got the goods on him—proofs writ out by the wife he deserted—and the child. Give him up, Wade. He's jest like a pizen-adder coilin' round your house—tryin' to ruin yer innocent sister——"

"The words of a lyin' woman!" shrieked Wade. "Ye'll eat the repeatin' of 'em. Now clear out—ye hounds!"

In his justified, wrathful frenzy, he had not even seen Donbrook join him. He realized for the first time that Chester was there—unarmed.

"Go back, cousin!" he commanded. "This is the last place ye ought to be at!"

Motionless Donbrook stood his ground. Something far outside him seemed to be watching the drama—wondering, quite impersonally, what part he was to play in it.

"Give him up, Wade. Don't force us into any keepin' your bullets off with ourn. We agreed among ourselves to do this job without no blood-lettin' if we could help it."

"We don't propose to harm him much!" cried the first speaker. "Jest smearin' on a little of this pitch we brung—and stickin' on a few of these feathers we brung—fer ornament like—and ridin' him out of our hills where he spies on us—and tries things worse'n that on you and yourn. But he won't never come back."

A new restlessness boiled in their huddled midst. They were moving nearer.

Out of the seismic mass sounded for the third time the voice of that one of them who was plainly their leader.

"If anybody fires the first shot, Wade, it'll be ye. But I tell ye now—it's take him we're a-goin' to!"

Clara threw herself forward, flinging wide the gate. She approached so near to the men they could have touched her with outstretched hands. Her steady gaze fixed itself on their center.

"Bash Miggons—ye—and yer brothers—and yer step-uncles—do ye think any of us wouldn't know ye if the night was twist as dark and them sneakin' little masks was twict as long? Be ashamed, Bash—be ashamed! Jest look what yer stepmother's sunk ye to—it's enough to make yer own Christian mother turn over in her grave."

The axle of the earth-beetle swarm detached itself. Bash stepped forward. He snatched the perforated muslin from his face.

"Well, anyhow," he said, "I kin show ye I ain't ashamed. It's as much for yer sake, Clara, as any other reason that we've come to git him. For yer sake, Clara. Even if ye do steady scorn me, I ain't a-goin' to stand by and see ye sed——"

A shot rang out.

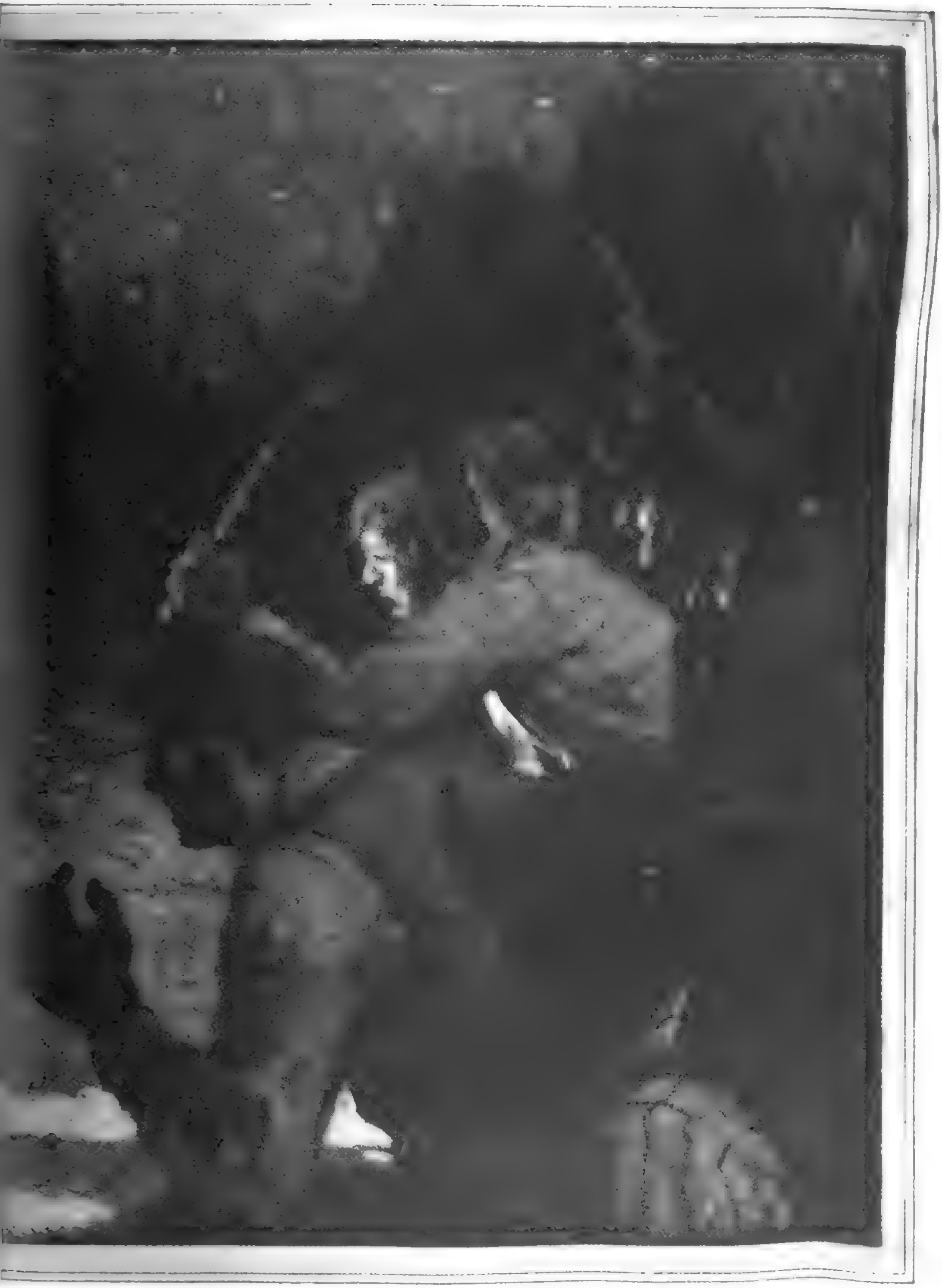
"Ye sha'n't never git that word spoke, Bash Miggons!"

It was a woman's voice—but not Clara's.

"So it's shootin', is it Wade?" snarled Bash. "Here's to ye, then!"

One of his younger brothers clutched him. "Bash—ye damn fool—that wasn't Wade

"That's him - there he is!" One of the mob cried it out as



stood like one risen from the blank earth before their blinking eyes.

that shot—it was old Lissie—thar she stands back by the door-sill—and she's got a gun——"

"Whoever done it, it got me." Bash's upper lip lifted above his teeth. "Ugh! In the hip, I think. At 'em, boys—an eye for an eye!"

There was a lunging rush. The beetle mass articulated itself to a quadrant of snarling units. Butt ends of rifles were brandished high in the air like clubs. Two or three of the men were taking unsteady aim. As Wade fired, some powerful blow knocked his gun upward. He clinched with his man, fastening the grip of two hands at his throat. The fellow gargled with a sound like a death-rattle. Four others hurled themselves upon them.

"Halt!"

Chester's right hand had gone up and outward. His command reechoed along the shoals of White Wing.

"Good God, men—take me—it's only me you want—leave these people alone. All they ask is that—all they've ever asked. I deserve to ride your rail. I've been an intruder—I've——"

He spoke too late.

Shots rattled unevenly as if from drunken, unwitting fingers that knew not what they did.

From Bash came a volley of oaths. Clara's reproaches were penetrating his blurred conscience with the pain of his wound.

"Now, who done that? Good God—" Bash's face went ashen white. "Some of you hound-pups has shot old Lissie!"

Wade gouged at the dirt that blinded his dazed eyes and ran to his sister.

The outlaws were forgotten now. They could slink away undeeded, as some fantastic vision that is born in the brain to be instantly effaced.

Like vapor shadows in a moonbeam, Bash and his men melted to nothingness. They were blotted out of the moonlit spaces, as if sinking at a signal into quicksands of darkness.

They became the hunted creatures they were.

"HE NEVER got that word spoke—he never!"

Lissie smiled. And though she had crumpled to her knees as if with the awkward weight of her dull, tired body, she lifted her head with a gesture that was proud—even queenly.

"He never got that word spoke—about Clara!"

Her eyes filmed over. She sank her tired weight to the earth as if it beckoned her, claimed her back, after her little hour of drugged, sterterous wakefulness 'twixt two eternities of sleep. She did not lie quite prone. Her head rested gently against a log of the cabin door-sill.

Clara stooped and clasped her sister's shoulders in her two arms and rocked her to and fro.

"She done this to me," she said, peering down at the closed eyes with the look of a mother. "She done this to me—from the time I was a baby till I was a big girl—she nu'sed me and rocked me like this——"

She did not weep. It was Wade that wept—like a child.

"I wanted ye to go, Cousin Chester," he sobbed. "I axed ye to go. I was afeared—afeared of what she was beginnin' to—afeared that if ye stayed out yer year and then went, Clara would never smile ag'in. But now—I axe ye to stay. It won't matter now. Nothin' won't matter now."

Chester took his limp hand, sinewy and horny—with the power that had made it defy the ceaseless goad of the soil—the whip-lash of the sun—the driving sting of winds and rain and frost—the power that accepted—unmurmuring—that never became an imprecation—now gone limp in a knotted tangle of poor, quivering, twitching muscles.

"No, Wade—it won't matter, dear old fellow—unless within a year I can make her love me well enough to be my wife—to be a mother to my boy. His grandmother has written Clara that she was about to send him to me—being herself too old and feeble for his care. There'll have to be two of us instead of one—but we'll stay on—if you'll let us."

Still Clara rocked her sister back and forth, yearningly, with eyes clear-bright and dry.

"She'd 'a' loved him so!" she crooned, half chanting. "She'd 'a' loved the little feller so! She always longed to see a child about the clearin'. She never stopped grievin' in her heart that we-uns was all growed up. Sleep, Lissie—sleep. Sleep——"

Working With a Will

Here's a Youngster of Twenty-Seven Who Had Bolsheviks Inside Him. He Abhorred Specializing, Wanted to Do Everything. You'll Be Interested in What Happened to Him

By Bonnie Ginger

FOR a year the town of Rocklea had been living in a state of anomalous pride.

For a year Mrs. Loftus Lambsweather, the novelist, had dwelt at Piny Slopes—the old Simson house out east of town, which she had bought and turned into a villa—and during that time she had steadily refused (usually through a lorgnette) to use Rocklea for anything but mail and groceries. The social leaders were in despair. Here "Sahib Smith," Mrs. Lambsweather's last novel of India, had been, and its sequel, "The Cobra's Coil," was being, written; and yet not one of them could boast of even an evanescent contact with the creator of the books. The very title of the forthcoming novel was known to them only through the papers.

"It's as if we didn't exist," said one lady.

"Well, we don't—for her," said Cleo Brewster. "It's because she's a writer. How could she keep her mind on her book if she got her Indian atmosphere all messed up with Occidental influences?" And no sooner did Cleo say this than they knew it was so, not only because Cleo, for all she was only twenty-five, had phenomenal worldly wisdom but also because she had the superb advantage of being the sister of her brother Jim.

"Perhaps, when the present book is finished," Cleo added, "she'll be more receptive to our social life." And then privately she asked Jim how much longer it ought to take Mrs. Lambsweather to finish "The Cobra's Coil."

"Well, it looks as if she turned them out about two a year—figure it out for yourself; you're good at figures," he said, with a double meaning for "figures," because Cleo's *fiancé*, Dr. Adder, was noticeably rotund. But Cleo did not resent the witticism. Jim's wit was an institution of Rocklea, as were his cleverness, good looks, versatility and so forth. "She's a frightful frump, anyhow," he went on. "Why do you bother about her? I wouldn't go two steps out of my way for her old salaams and sahibs and rickshaws." And he went on entertaining the family jauntily at dinner with a breezy account of a runaway that afternoon down by the square.

And, as usual, his mother giggled between her lapses into wonderment that she should be the parent of this fascinating prodigy, while Cleo smiled approval, and Harold gazed anxiously—Harold was not always sure he just got Jim's jokes—and Biddy shot him solemn looks out of her young, deep-set, food-questing eyes.

For twenty-seven years Jim Brewster had kept Rocklea on the *qui vive*. Pages might be filled with a mere catalogue of the things he could do, and do better than any other young man in the county. He was so gifted it almost scared one. He sang wonderfully, acted with true talent, was a champion at tennis and swimming and golf; he carved wood and wrote poetry, and the Eagle Drug Store had exhibited his landscapes in pastels and oils. He was a devil at driving cars and at all card games; he could cook at picnics like a chef—and *how* he danced! Then, too, he took part in the civic life of the town, and was a trustee of the library and was on a dozen committees and belonged to all the clubs, in most of which he held office. And in all of this he was so modest and spontaneous that he was

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regarded as a flower in the buttonhole rather than a thorn in the flesh of the male youth of Rocklea.

A few did say that he might have done better to specialize. But he had given all his gifts an equal scope, and now he was in the position of King Solomon with his wives; if he made a favorite of any one talent, all the others set up a howl, and he was too amiable himself to like an inward conflict.

As a matter of fact, he had a favorite. He liked to write. Plays, of course. Not that he had ever finished one. If he began one, however earnestly, up flared some other gift and demanded instant self-expression. But some day he knew he would get control of the Bolsheviks inside him and write the Great American Play. At twenty-seven there is a lot of time ahead.

NO WONDER no one ever paid any attention to Harold. Indeed, Harold himself, looking back over his twenty-four years, could not find one spot on which to focus the light. He was the unobtrusive assistant to Carkleby, of the rustic furniture factory, a position he had reached by unnoticed plodding since the age of seventeen.

Still less conspicuous was Biddy, who, however, was no Brewster at all, but merely the orphan of Mrs. Brewster's adopted sister, so that even her rank of cousin was fictitious. Biddy was just twenty-one.

To-night, when Biddy had finished supper, she stared a moment at Jim in the rather blank way some considered stupid, and then went down the back yard to tend her sweet peas. These were her sole claim to publicity, unless one includes the six thousand dollars she had inherited from her mother. About ten minutes later she looked up to see Jim before her, a tall, slim figure against the evening sun.

"Don't stop," he said, so she went on snipping, and he watched her with momentary interest. Such a little kid! Did her hair wrong. Her hands nice, though—only too brown. And say—darned pretty lashes when she looked up like that, reminding him of some animal or other, an animal not afraid, merely hiding in its hole and gazing out. Why did she go into a hole? He sat down on the grass by her and talked of this and that in his clever way. A far vista out front gave periodic views of Harold, coatless, mowing the lawn. At last he asked her if she wouldn't hear him rehearse his speech for the Town Club dinner. It wasn't to be a funny speech, he added, and at that she brightened.

He began to orate. The sun lowered, approached its setting. He went through the speech a second time, standing, now, to make the gestures. He had got so into it that once he paused and actually looked for the pitcher from which to pour the glass of water. At that moment Harold, still coatless, came toward them. Jim discarded oratory.

"Don't do it, Hal."

"Do what?" asked Harold meekly.

"Talk furniture. 'As the Twig Is Bent, the Seat's Inclined,' by John Rustic."

"Don't make fun," said Biddy quietly.

"I did want to mention, Jim," said Harold timidly, "that Mr. Carkleby needs an assistant secretary, and as you're not working just now——"

"What's that you say? I—not working? Is that so? Why, Hal, to-night I've got a conference that may lead to—well, if you want to see something make your old furniture business look like a fish-pond in a long drought, you just wait till you see what happens in a certain deal *I'm* in."

"Oh—well, I hope—I mean, I beg your pardon," said Harold gently, and after gazing at the blisters on his palms and failing to find any further inspiration, he went off to put the mower in the shed.

"I don't care!" exclaimed Jim. (Biddy had not spoken.) "He's so—O Lord, so—Now, why are you looking at me like that, Biddy? Oh, but I know what you mean. And plenty of people prefer his sort. Tortoises. Faithful servants. Plodders. Slow, but sure. Sure of what, hey? The dizzy heights to which Hal has climbed—" He broke off, seeing Biddy's head droop. He leaned over, contrite. "Oh, say—I *was* filthy! And I know you're fond of Hal——"

"Yes, I am; but—" Her expression meant: "What has that to do with it?" And Jim was annoyed afresh, but he laughed.

"You think I ought to settle to something. Well, so I mean to do, when the time comes. I'm going to write plays. But writers have to have experience first. That's why I go in for all sorts of things. Of course I may marry a rich widow. How about that? Know of one, Chickabiddy?" And he tried to make her smile, but in vain.

At last he departed in his blue racer, and soon after Biddy and Hal took a street-car for the movies.

MEANTIME, a rich young widow was approaching the town of Rocklea on the eight-thirty train.

She was Mrs. Lambsweather's sister, Dorine Gland. She had married Artemus Gland, maker of Gland's Gloves That the Hand Loves. (Your own hand may have loved them.) And whether or not Dorine had been infatuated with Artemus, who was forty years older than she, at any rate she had profited by the union. He had died a year ago.

It was a great shock to Mrs. Lambsweather to get Dorine's message to meet her at the train. It meant that Dorine would probably remain all summer, for she would never have gone to the exertion of coming for a shorter stay. But at the thought of interruption to "The Cobra's Coil" the novelist wore the expression of a tigress defending her cub. She knew what Dorine would expect—fastidious house-parties, guests from cities, all the amusement brought to her feet—for Dorine was one of the laziest young women drawing the breath of life. And, of course, Rocklea, even if it had not been ruthlessly snubbed, could hardly have produced the social type to which Dorine was addicted. For these reasons it was not very graciously that Mrs. Lambsweather dispatched Angus with the limousine to meet the train.

It was no limousine she saw climbing the hill at eight-forty-five. It was a bright-blue racer. And the driver was not red-headed Angus; it was a man with black hair. A brunet, almost Oriental, she thought, as the racer swung to the terrace and performed a deft curve to the porte-cochère.

When the sisters had embraced, Dorine—as golden as her name—presented Mr. Brewster in a beautiful drawl.

"It was a blow-out, and he offered his own car. Wasn't that thrilling, dear? And to-morrow he's going to bring his sister to call."

While the dark young man bent charmingly over her hand, Mrs. Lambsweather's mind was visited by several swift thoughts. She remembered now that she had seen him speeding about on the country roads; so evidently he lived in Rocklea. He had, it seemed, a sister. If the sister were as presentable as he, here was the solution of the entertainment problem. She was the surer of it when to his thoroughly delightful manner of being introduced he added a few phrases of deep admiration for Mrs. Lambsweather's writings, appreciation of the villa and congratulations for the grounds and view. Mrs. Lambsweather warmly seconded the invitation.

"And be sure to come for tea," she added. And Dorine put in:

"Yes; come for tea. It will be thrilling to meet your sister."

The young man gazed eloquently, leaped into the racer, and the car dropped down the hill like a rain-drop down a window-pane.

"I've been too busy to get acquainted, you see, dear," the writer explained. Dorine said she quite understood, and—willowy and palely blond—followed her sister into the house, consumed at great leisure a full-blown repast, got herself, with even more leisure, into apricot negligée, and then—only then—asked about "The Cobra's Coil" before settling on a *chaise longue* with the latest novel by Mrs. Lambsweather's hated rival, Agatha Martinelli. This was not cruelty on Dorine's part; it was only tactlessness, because Dorine was too lazy to think.

What a contrast with the mental state of James Q. Brewster! Jim was driving his racer through the night, far from business conferences, in a moonlit world peopled by one person—a pale-gold female with every attribute of willowy charm, stirring, languid gazes, low musical voice, eyelashes—and the name Dorine.

It was nearly midnight when he abruptly turned homeward—abruptly, because he needed writing-materials on which to set down the poem he had composed to the woman he knew he already loved. And such was his ardor that on passing Harold's room and seeing Harold reading, he went in and apologized for his rudeness about the rustic furniture.

"I was impatient and temperamental, Hal, because something was about to happen to me, and I sensed it, you know."

"And did it happen?" asked Harold respectfully.

At that Jim loosed his throbbing heart. And Harold listened wide-eyed, humble and glad. All at once Jim remembered his poem. He began fishing among Harold's papers.

Harold showed a sudden alarm at this, and blushingly rescued a composition-book.

"I keep my notes in here," he said nervously.

"What are you writing?" asked Jim.

"Just my notes on my readings."

Harold blushed more than before. Jim saw a lot of little books lying round, with markers in them, and some propped open by other books. But he was too exalted to be curious, and the few titles he read did not stick in his mind. Grabbing some blank pages he began to write his poem.

"YES; that would be thrilling."

It was Dorine's slavey, that word "thrilling." She worked it morning, noon and night. And yet Jim thought it ever vivid and ardent. But he could think nothing less than perfect of Dorine.

Dorine, palely golden, slim, in wafty or clinging white, usually reclining in a low chair, smiling up at him, laughing at his jokes—yes; he was the one man who could make her really laugh. "Oh, you're thrilling, Jim Brewster! I shall die laughing at you one of these days." A slender milk-white hand touches his arm, or her fan brushes his hair. She invites him to one of his own chocolates, which have suddenly become enchanted. He writes verses, mixing up lots of Greek names; he feels like Shelley and Keats. "Oh, thrillingly classical!" she says. "I know you will thrill the world some day." "Yes; and you will be the cause." At that she laughs.

Meantime, Cleo managed things socially. She soon discovered how to handle parties at Piny Slopes so that Mrs. Lambsweather should not be disturbed. They had to be out there because Dorine simply would not bother to come into town. But she was so charming that the young people gradually accepted her on the basis of her inactivity. Now and then, during a gathering on the lawn, Mrs. Lambsweather would come out "to breathe between chapters," as she put it, in reality to see how fared things between Jim and Dorine. When she remembered their attachment, she was interested in it. Besides, she was rather studying Jim as a type, possibly for future use.

One day, Jim, primping for his call at the villa, found Biddy studying shorthand in her room. He asked her why she never joined the gatherings at Piny Slopes. Certainly she was asked.

Oh, of course. But—and she indicated her pothooks.

"Nonsense! It isn't that. You don't like Dorine," he accused.

"Why, Jim, I don't really know her! How could I dislike her?"

"And why *don't* you know her? Because you don't want to. But is that the way to treat my future wife?"

"Is she—that?" Biddy asked low, and looking down.

"Well"—and he colored slightly—"we—it's beginning to look that way. Now you're staring at me—what do you mean? What's the matter with you? Always looking things and never saying them. I suppose you mean I can't support a wife. There"—and he laughed angrily—"just because the oil lands haven't—as if big deals like that were pulled off in a day! Though even if that fell through, haven't I plenty of other ideas—and good ones? Besides, just making money—what's that?"

"No; there are lots of other things, Jim. You know I've always said that."

"Now you mean my writing. Well then, think how it helps a young author to be on intimate terms with a woman like Mrs. Lambsweather! Her stuff's rot, but she has a big reputation, and she knows all sorts of famous writers. For instance, Alfred Burley, the poet. He's coming to stay at the lake soon, and he'll visit at Piny Slopes. Think of his influence if I—when I finish my play!"

"Have you begun a play?"

"Practically. Dorine knows the plot. She has faith in me. That's a true inspiration—some one's faith in you."

"Or your own faith in you," she murmured. He flushed, frowning.

"Oh, well—that, of course! Got a match?"

She had none, and he went into Harold's room for one, tossing her a "So long!" as he left. But he did not at once leave Harold's room. For a quarter of an hour Biddy waited motionless for him to emerge. She wanted to say some little thing to remove the constraint. Why was he staying in there when he had been so eager to get out to Piny

Slopes and had only entered her room to get her to tie his scarf?

And then he came out and slammed the door after him. He looked angry, and he seemed to have forgotten Biddy. He ran down-stairs and she heard his car purr from the yard. She slipped into Harold's room, but there was nothing unusual there—just Hal's various books and note-books on the desk. Hal was always reading and studying.

About a week after that, Biddy became a stenographer in the office of Carkleby, Harold's boss. In about another week, Dorine and Jim were engaged.

Not openly. She said it had happened so suddenly. Besides, a secret betrothal would be thrilling. And certainly any sort of an engagement whatever was thrilling to Jim.

THEN came the crash. Saunders, the oil-lands speculator, went to pieces, carrying Jim with him—carrying Jim's savings, his share in a trotter, in a Montana mine, in a friend's invention, in a Ferris wheel, a kennels, a new cold-cream—and a score of other investments, sharings and outright possessions, including the blue racer. Jim Brewster was carless.

"But he'll find something more thrilling than oil," said Dorine to Cleo, and Cleo said, "Oh, yes!" as if, though the heavens should fall, that brother of hers would rise through the ruins, waving the banner of inevitable success.

Buoyed by Dorine's sweet faith, Jim himself was jaunty. He even joked and told Harold he guessed he'd see what Carkleby had to offer. Harold took him seriously and deplored the filling of the secretarial vacancy. Jim laughed in his face.

"I'm no office-boy. Do you think I'll lack opportunity for my free-lance abilities, my initiative, my originality?"

Nevertheless, he failed to find those opportunities. Saunders had made him finicky; he had accustomed himself to little work and a classy business atmosphere—Saunders' offices had been elegant—and the only openings just now were humdrum, impossible, such as hardware, the grain-elevator, the bank. Besides, Saunders was already planning a come-back—better wait for the new deal. But he was out of cash, and not paying his mother enough. Still, he could not bury himself in drudgery with Dorine waiting for him. Especially as other young men had managed to wedge in at Piny Slopes—young men from the lake. Of these was Alfred Burley, who had a beautiful touring car—though he was not so very young.

Presently Jim began to grow a trifle pale and to lose a pound or two of his nice slender weight.

One day, after several hesitations, he furtively entered Harold's office and asked for a loan.

Harold was deeply distressed. In halting words and with eyes averted he explained how all his money was invested in the furniture except a few hundred he was using for his vacation, which began at five that afternoon. At the word "vacation" he turned away, staring from the window, his hands behind him wringing each other in a culmination of dismay. Jim laughed.

"Don't let it upset you, you nut!"

And when Harold swung round imploringly, Jim left the office, whistling.

He went to the grain-elevator. But after ten minutes he came out. The terms they proposed!

Thank heaven Hal was going away that night! And at supper Jim was exceedingly polite to him, so that every one was very uncomfortable and Hal could hardly eat. Then, in the hall, Jim stumbled against Hal's suitcase. Beside it was a neat pile of five volumes. Jim stooped and read the titles. Yes; they were books about the culture of the will. That was Hal's dissipation—it was what he studied of nights, and made notes on. The will! Jim let out a queer laugh, and for a moment his foot hovered as if to hoist that stack of books through the open door. Just then Biddy appeared behind him.

"I'd think," he said, "that, from the attention he pays it, he'd be *writing* will books instead of reading them."

"But he doesn't set up to be a writer."

"Meaning that, if he did, he'd do it, instead of just talk about it. But you used to say things plain out; you didn't use to hint," was his irascible answer. Tears came to Biddy's eyes. Then he was ashamed. "I know you weren't hinting. And say, if you're going to the station with Hal, I'll go, too, if you like."

Her face lighted. Harold, too, was so pleased that Jim was going that his gratitude was embarrassing. The sight of Dorine in Burley's car did not assuage Jim's inward boilings. He heard Hal asking Biddy if that were Mrs. Lambsweather's sister. Then Jim thought: "Lord, he's never met Dorine! His future sister-in-law! That's because he sticks himself away with his note-books." And in spite of a resolution to bid Hal a brotherly farewell, when the train came in he could not help fastening his eyes sardonically on the books and saying:

"Behave yourself, old man. Remember that even the maddest impulse can be kept under control."

Harold blushed scarlet.

"Biddy," said Jim, when the train had gone, "I'm not in a nice mood. So I'll not go with you."

"Jim, if you have time—I'd like you to come with me for a little walk," was her unexpected answer.

And Jim, looking down at her, thought she was a Biddy he had never seen before. And as they walked on, her silence seemed pregnant of something. But of what?

When they had reached a secluded spot in the square, he said,

"Come, Biddy; tell me what's wrong." And he thought, "She is going to offer me some of her money." And he began to wonder what he should say. Ought he to take it? But, also—ought he not? He did not notice that her fingers were interlocked and that she seemed to be trying to pull them out by the roots.

"Jim," she managed to say at last, "you—you aren't happy, are you?" And then she broke off, inarticulate, tremulous. He gazed at her fixedly.

"What do you mean—happy?"

"I don't know!" was wrung out of her. "I don't know what I mean. I mean that you have never found yourself. There's a wall—cleverness—people praise you—but there's a wall." She ended up in a sort of anguish for her own incoherence.

A frown was knitting itself deeply into his brows.

"Well—and what's behind the wall?"

She appeared to shrink, but she looked up at him.

"You," she said faintly. "*You!*" And then abruptly she hurried away.

He remained staring blankly at the bench that had held her. Presently his unconscious mind identified the bench as one of the products of Harold's rustic-furniture firm, and he swung away, pursuing a scowling course through the now dusky park.

"Her nerve! Her blamed nerve!"

Across his path as if written in invisible words flamed a challenge: "Isn't she right?"

"Damn it, yes!" And a sinister voice within him sneered: "Sure, you can't put off the truth forever. You don't need any dinner, Brewster. We've got to have a little talk, and it might as well be now."

YES; the wall of his own laziness.

Why, he was lazier than—Dorine.

Yes; though he was considered the busiest fellow in Rocklea. And certainly he was the most active. But the two aren't the same. Jim Brewster had never done an honest day's work in his twenty-seven years. In getting out of the path of labor he was the most agile man alive.

That skill in escape went by flattering names—cleverness, versatility, talent, genius. But no human being had ever told him what it really was. And yet he knew. Deep in himself he knew. Yet he had never admitted it. No; not even that day when he went into Hal's room for a match and had seen the will books and in derision had opened them, and in doing so had encountered, through the ambling phrases of some genial, knowing old scientist, an arraignment that he had struggled against for a quarter of an hour before he could twist himself free and escape.

Only—he had not escaped.

Like the Old Man of the Sea, this winking wiseacre had ridden him day and night. "You call this work? A verse to a woman—but the phrases aren't new and the rimes are what popped into your head. That isn't work. Nor was it work to run out and conduct a meeting, or to come home and sing a new song—you didn't sing it right; you can't breathe properly; you never worked at learning how to sing. You discussed that new novel, but you don't really know what it's about, for that would mean concentration, and concentration is work. No, my lad; a thing's all very well till it reaches the point of work. That's where you drop it and pick up something else—till it, too, reaches the same point. You'll flit from flower to flower, but make no honey. What! Grind away in a tight, sticky little cell? No; you'll glitter with pollen, but some *dull* bee must make the honey. Well, Brewster, you'll never get away with it. Some day you'll be called. Better start in right now before your brain-stuff gets rigid. Where do you stand?"

But he had not stood; he had run.

To-night, however, fear did grip him. He did not say, "I will learn to work," but he faced the possibility of trying. That was his frame of mind when, having wandered miles into the country, he was overtaken by the glare of an automobile that proved to be old Carkleby's, with Carkleby himself at the wheel. The factory owner had been to Harrington to see his sister.

Carkleby slowed up and offered Jim a lift. He did this less in a manner of courtesy than of curiosity. He was not famed for courtesy, and he had never approved of Harold's brother, but a young man, lately impoverished, miles from town afoot in the moonlight is a cause for wonder. Jim understood this as well as he could understand such an acknowledged enigma as tight-mouthed old Carkleby, and, as they rode on, he knew the manufacturer was studying him, and Jim was not averse to the process. An inspiration had come to him, and he had already arranged his features—which the bright moonlight made fairly visible—to fit his forthcoming speech—a speech it was going to be much easier to make because Harold had gone on vacation.

AT LAST he voiced it. Would Mr. Carkleby take him on as a salesman?

Carkleby made no reply for at least thirty seconds. What he then said was: "No."

Jim was prepared for this, and began to present his case with more polish. Miles sped by, and Carkleby listened and was silent. Then Jim was silent, too.

All at once Carkleby turned his eyes on Jim in a swift, piercing gaze. Until then Jim had been contemplating only his profile, sharp and knotty like some of the rustic products of the factory. Now his eyes were like some instrument for boring holes. They bored into Jim and set him squirming. In sharp words the old gentleman read out Jim's character as a jig-saw cuts in and out of an intricate pattern. He reduced Jim to a heap of shavings.

"When you've shown you can stick at something, Jim, come to me and I'll consider it. Of course I could use your talents, but not as they stand now." And he shot the car round the curve that circled the hill on which the lights of Mrs. Lambsweather's villa gleamed down through the scudding trees. He did not speak again until they were passing the factory, just on the edge of town. There he stopped the car.

"There," he said, "is application. There is concentration of talents. As a young man, I aspired to many things. I loved music. I enjoyed games, sports. I would have given my ears to have traveled. But there is what I *did*. Because I would not have been a success at the other things. A man who has not found out what he can succeed at might as well die. And now I will tell you a secret. You will please not repeat it. But when he returns a month hence, your brother Hal, as he already knows, will become my partner." And he signified that Jim could now leave the car.

Walking home, Jim fumed. So that old wood-butcher thought that factory of his spelled success! And he dared to hold up Hal as an example—and, anyhow, damn Hal, the little tightwad, refusing to lend money to his own brother when he had just been made partner in the firm. And Biddy, too, who might have said, "Won't you take a little loan?"

If the thought sometimes hovered that his own Dorine, with her fortune, might have suggested his using a few of her hundreds to swing himself up to his proper plane again, he put it aside. Why, he knew she had faith in him. Yes; and he would prove he was worthy.

The very next day Fate smiled on him. He discovered that Alfred Burley, the poet, had a sweetheart in New York and was to be married to her in the fall. What brought him to Piny Slopes was some business affairs of Dorine's, for it turned out that he wrote his poetry on the side and earned his living in the law. He was Dorine's lawyer.

But this was the lesser discovery. The other was that Burley was interested in the drama, was connected with a dramatic group in New York, and, having heard through Dorine that Jim wrote "thrilling" plays, desired to see Jim's output. Within an hour Jim—for the first time in his life really embarrassed—was reading to Burley the two or three playlets he had finished just before the close of the war.

"Of course," said Burley, "they're useless now, but they show remarkable promise."

And then he listened to three or four unfinished ones and his enthusiasm increased.

"Of course the technique—but that will come to you. I'd like to see you go in for this seriously—especially the local things. Your characterization is gorgeous, and delightfully humorous. See here; turn these two out for us right away. I go back to town next Monday."

Jim had them ready, but only to suffer a bitter disappointment. Burley was very kind, however.

"I wouldn't show these to the play-reader. I was wrong to ask you to hurry. Try again, and more carefully. I'm still strong for you, but you've got lots to learn, of course. Still, that won't scare you; you know play-writing is like everything else—it's hard work. And stick to local life. Try again and send them on in a couple of weeks."

Work! That word again! Well, the Old Man of the Will Books could have his chuckle. He'd won. Jim was down to brass tacks for the first time in his life.

AS IF to smooth his way, Fate sent Mrs. Lambsweather, who had completed "The Cobra's Coil," for a holiday at the lake, and she took Dorine with her.

Jim did not tell her what he was doing. He wanted to surprise her with his success, if success were to come.

It was hideous, though, sticking to this new vow of work—and alone. He grew pale and tired from lack of knowledge of his tools; he lost valuable energy every day just in forcing himself to his desk. He told no one what he was doing, and that lack of public interest, that stimulating eagerness of people to see what he was doing *now*, increased his difficulties, but it showed him also how little he had ever depended on anything real for his inspiration. He had been just a show-off, a mountebank. And yet—Lord—how he missed that intoxicant of acclaim!

One day, going down-stairs, he heard his mother say to Biddy:

"But, child, if you don't eat you'll be ill. If your work is making you ill, you must stop it—you must, dear."

"I'm all right, auntie," Biddy said, but when Jim met her at the foot of the stairs he saw tears in her eyes.

He had been very cool to her since that night in the square, and as she was out of the house in the daytime and he at work at night, they had hardly encountered each other except at meals, and not often then, for Jim had become very irregular.

Now he stopped before her and asked her why she was crying. She drew back.

"I'm not crying at all," she said proudly.

"Well then, will you come down the yard with me? I want to talk to you, Chickabiddy. I want your advice."

She brightened at once, and they went to the yard.

"I'm not confiding in one other soul, Biddy." He did not add that only a moment ago had he thought of confiding in her. Then he told her about the play, and, of course, it was but a step after that to his reading it to her.

Nothing could have been more fortunate. It was simply astounding how this little silent kid understood what he was getting at, and how she saw some of the errors and suggested little changes—little, of course. And when the humorous lines made her smile, he knew they *must* be funny, and when she laughed outright, he felt like wiring to Burley, "Stupendous success assured."

These were the moments of exhilaration. Depression followed, but he never lost courage. Down within him a voice whispered that he was getting the hang of work, and that what he was writing was good—good!

"You're so pale and thin!" his mother cried for the hundredth time—she thought he was inventing something. He answered her with a great laugh.

Then the playlet—he had concentrated on a one-acter—was on its way to Burley, and Jim went over to see Dorine.

But only for the week-end. Burley had wanted the other play, too.

No one ever knew how hard it was to leave Dorine. She was so lovely and sweet, and so sure that whatever that delicious secret of his was, it was thrilling. She had a lot of other suitors, but she swore he had no rival in the depths of her faithful heart. Yet it took all his courage to go back to work.

Work! Yes; now that the glow of his first achievement was over, work loomed a sinister, horrible thing. But the time would come when he'd not feel that way about it. The time would come, said the will books—he was reading some of them which he swiped from Hal's library—when he would go to his day's work as a bridegroom to his bride. And, to tell the truth, in a few days the joy of his labors did begin to creep back to him. The new playlet began to grip him even harder than the first, and he realized he had gained some technique. But, as before, he took Biddy as his mentor and critic. And she, with this glorious duty entrusted to her and her alone, lost her pallor and began to bloom in a way that would have arrested his attention if it had not all been given to lines, situations and dénouements.

And out of this absorption he was yanked into the seventh heaven by Burley's telegram:

> Can you come? Immediate production. Curtain-raiser. Special bill. Alterations and cutting necessary.

He packed and 'phoned to Dorine at the lake.

It was very difficult not to tell her the object of his trip, but he gritted his teeth and said he was going on a business mission.

But while he talked through the 'phone, it began to strike him that Dorine was not as responsive as usual. Her voice sounded cool and strange, and she said "thrilling" only once. And then he asked if she were offended because he wasn't coming over to see her. For she must understand he would never go off like this, for probably a whole week, without seeing her if he could possibly help it.

"Oh, I quite understand," was her reply "Don't worry about *me.* I wouldn't interfere with your business engagements for the world." And she rang off.

IT WORRIED him a lot, just the same, and on going to the station he would have passed Mrs. Lambsweather unseeing if she had not hailed him.

She told him she had returned to Piny Slopes to start another Oriental book.

"But why didn't Dorine come back with you?" he demanded.

"Oh, she wasn't quite ready. And it isn't so convenient for me to have people around when I'm starting a new novel," she said, with something like asperity, and added, "Besides, she and Harold are company for each other at the lake."

"Harold—my brother Hal—at the *lake?*"

"Why, didn't you know? He came there last week." And then, leaning toward Jim, she said, "Tell me, Jim; is it true that Harold is to be Carkleby's partner?"

"Well, I supposed it was a secret, but evidently Hal can't keep it," said Jim, who was no longer thinking of Hal at all. "Say, Mrs. Lambsweather; I've just been talking to Dorine, and I think she's hurt because I'm going away without seeing her—you don't think she's seriously hurt, do you? It would kill me to think that, for you know we're as good as engaged."

"My dear Jim"—and the lady regarded him stealthily—"you know you *have* neglected her lately. Oh, yes; I know you were busy. But—there; don't be upset. Dorine's a little spoiled, and she'll get over her pique, I'm sure. It all happened so suddenly. Yes; she told me there was something between you. Just write her a nice letter; I'm sure she'll forgive you."

It did not strike him at the time that this was a strangely non-committal speech. On the train he wrote pages and pages to his beloved, and then New York and the stage of a theatre during rehearsals swallowed him for a week.

Then, after a wild, blurred dream, he was on his way back to Rocklea. In his pocket were the notices from four papers, three of which gave first mention to his "little comedy," the other dropping a belief that the author would be heard from anon.

True, it was a semiprofessional production and might have got scantier attention had more theatres been open, but to Jim these notices meant fame—in the future, at least. He pictured his reception in Rocklea, where the New York papers had a wide sale.

He reached home about seven. As he descended from the car, his eyes encountered the excited face of the freight-agent, Ike Leavitt, one of his admirers. It would be just like Ike to acclaim him right there on the platform, and he was assembling a smiling protest when Ike, grabbing him, pointed toward a part of town concealed by the station, and from which direction he saw a cloud of rolling black smoke.

"The factory—the furniture factory!" cried Ike, almost beside himself that he could not go to the fire. Then he flew down the platform, yelling his information to some other alighting passenger.

All able-bodied citizens had, in fact, gone to the blaze. Jim headed for it too.

But already the smoke was thinning. As he hurried along, Jim unconsciously took up his fantasy of how the people would greet him when, cheated of a real conflagration, they would find themselves facing the superior spectacle of James Brewster, playwright and native son.

"Hello, Jim! Be that you?"

"Oh, hello, Uncle Nick. Going to the fire?"

"Yep, aimin' to." And Uncle Nick, one of the village characters, struggled with his basket of vegetables and his cane until Jim relieved him of the basket. And remembering how Uncle Nick was a great reader of the metropolitan papers, he said,

"I suppose you saw the notice about me in the *News*."

"Oh, yep. You been to New York, ain't you—cavortin' about the theayters? But I guess 'tain't any livelier there than 'tis right here when we've a mind to get out on to the streets, hey?"

In a moment Lem Thomas, the lawyer, had picked them up in his car.

"Guess *this* would make a scene in a play?" Jim asked craftily. Lem grazed a hound dog and swore.

"If there was a wind, I reckon 'twouldn't be any play. As 'tis, smoke's thickening up again."

In no time they were at the factory, and Jim found himself alongside Andrews, the banker, in a dense throng.

"No," informed the banker; "there's no one inside. They've got it under now. So you've been down to the big town, hey?"

"Yes. Pretty hard work, too, rehearsing a play—being my first—but still——"

"Good God! Is that fool Dobson going to get a hose on that roof or not?" exclaimed Andrews, and he projected himself through the crowd. At that moment, feminine voices hailed Jim. One of the girls who spoke was an ex-flame of his, Allie Burns. Allie told him how the fire started.

"Say, Allie," said Jim; "do you know you're the very image of the girl who took the lead in my play?"

"Well, tell me—was she as fat as I am?" laughed Allie. "Because I've got an offer to sing in concert, and the girls tell me I'm too fat. Have I gained since I quit going with you? I thought it was making me thin."

Bursts of laughter greeted this.

"Hey, there he is. Jim! You're the fellow we want! Come here." It was Milt Opdyke calling from a group of men. Milt was the editor of the *Call*.

Jim went, framing his face to the blushing acceptance of the belated congratulations he felt he was now about to receive at last.

"Jim," Opdyke commanded, "you tell 'em what you wrote home—that the fire-wagons run all night in New York and nobody ever even goes to the window to look."

JIM made only one more effort to win recognition as a coming playwright. It was after Jake Furness had displayed brilliant daring in the matter of saving a gable. He said:

"I'd like to put a scene like that in a play. Though I think the fellow would be killed."

"Well," replied Doc Jessup, "I hope to God Jake doesn't get killed till he's paid me for that Irish setter he bought a year ago last March."

The fire had routed Jim.

A moment later he forgot his chagrin in the surprise of being accosted by old Carkleby himself, who appeared hatless and coatless from somewhere about the factory.

"Well," snapped the manufacturer, "*you're* here; but where's that precious brother of yours? For all he cares, I suppose the plant could have burned to the ground."

"Harold? Why, I didn't know—isn't he here?"

"No, he isn't. He never is any more. And you can tell him from me that if he doesn't do his spooning out of office-hours he can look for some one else to give him a partnership in a factory business, for he certainly will not find it in *my* plant. I don't know that I want him, anyhow—a man who can be made a fool of by a little yellow-haired doll."

Jim did not move a muscle. Without his faintest cognizance the fire was brought to the officially conquered state and the mob went back to its interrupted dinner. At last Jim found himself wandering homeward with it.

Outside the Brewster house he stopped, looking in at the dining-room windows. His mother and Biddy and Cleo—but no Harold.

The three looked strangely solemn.

"I ought to fry in hell for my suspicions, but—what else can it be?"

And because he could not endure the torture of suspense, he took a car for Piny Slopes.

Mrs. Lambsweather was on the terrace culling roses in the light of the setting sun, which gave her a garish cast enhanced by her Oriental costume. She was considerably embarrassed at sight of Jim, but his apparent calmness reassured her; and she explained that she always steeped herself in Oriental atmosphere before starting a new book about India.

"And you, Jim," she said softly, "bring a touch of the East—your darkness, especially with this light upon you—you are really fascinating, Sahib Brewster."

"Where's Dorine?" Jim asked.

Mrs. Lambsweather became confused again.

"She's still at the lake. I couldn't have her here while I was in the first stages of creation."

"When is she coming back?"

Mrs. Lambsweather became ingenuous. "How should I know? And why do you take this tone, Jim, as if you were grilling me? Why don't you 'phone to Dorine and ask her yourself?"

"All right; I will."

But when he stepped toward the house, she stopped him. She seemed scared now.

"Jim, what do you expect to discover?"

"That she is flirting with my simple-minded brother Harold to punish me for a fancied neglect. And if that's so, it's not only very petty of her but it's in filthy bad taste, and I'm going to tell her so—what's more."

And then the expression on the novelist's face so changed that Jim paled before its ominous pity.

"Oh, poor boy! But you might as well hear it from me as from any one else—better, in fact. Oh, Jim, Dorine is going to marry your brother Harold. The engagement is announced."

Jim sank upon a bench. It was one of the rustic-furniture benches, but he did not notice that. Nor did he notice Mrs. Lambsweather bending over him with yearning sympathy.

"She's a rotter, Jim. She's been rotten to me, too. She was going to live with me—and I couldn't imagine why she wanted to stay here, but it was because she's lost every cent she had; what she hadn't spent she invested wrong, and—and you *didn't* seem very prosperous, you know—and then Harold came there to the lake, and he fell in love with her and told her about his partnership—and, of course, he is just clay in her hands. He rushes over to the lake every evening from the factory—he has bought a car——"

"A car," murmured Jim vaguely.

Mrs. Lambsweather wiped her eyes furtively.

"Yes. But, Jim, don't you see you're far better off? She isn't worthy of you. She would have made you wretched, and you'd soon have tired of her. She hasn't any brain, you know."

Jim's haggard eyes looked up searchingly. "I thought you liked our being—together."

The novelist flushed. Then she said: "Yes; I did at first. When she talked of living with me, I thought, if you married her, it would free me. We are not *en rapport*, you know. But now I'm glad you've escaped. I've learned to like you far too well, Jim dear, to want to see you sacrificed to that selfish, empty-headed sister of mine."

Jim rose. Mrs. Lambsweather's earnest sympathy hardly counted just now. He suddenly broke into a strange, harsh laugh.

"So that's where the books about the will have got little Harold! By God, he picked the right literature! I'll say that for him, damned if I won't!"

And he swung off down the hill, leaving the novelist bewildered and dismayed.

JIM did not go straight home. He could not face that solemn trio he had seen through the dining-room window. He walked townward by a roundabout way that took him, about nine o'clock, past the factory. It was lighted in the part that had been on fire, and firemen and workmen were on the grounds. As Jim paused there, he saw Carkleby come out, and Carkleby saw him in turn before Jim could collect his wits enough to hide.

"Brewster, come here, will you?"

And, to his amazement, Carkleby asked Jim into the office.

"The fact is, young fellow—I was present at your play."

The word "play" had a magic effect on Jim. It eliminated his tragedy from his harrowed mind.

"You—you were in New York, and saw my play?"

"Yes. I happened to be there on business, and that seemed to be about the only show I cared to see. I couldn't believe my eyes when I read your name opposite the curtain-raiser. I sent back to find out. I tell you I was surprised. And now I want to congratualte you. It was a fine little thing."

Jim was trembling with delight.

"Why—I—I hardly know what to say, Mr. Carkleby."

Carkleby waved.

"Oh, never mind that. And now, Jim"—he called him "Jim" quite easily—"I'm going to tell you I've had my eye on you for a long time. I know you're clever; you have originality and pep. You lack certain abilities that have made your brother Harold so valuable—until this damn-foolishness about the girl got into his head, and if he doesn't get it out, he'll find himself in a queer fix, let me tell you. But you have other qualities— Well, in short, Jim, I'm going to offer you a rather smooth salesmanship, with a salary and commissions, to enable you to find time to work at your plays. After all, you've got to support yourself. And maybe plays are your destiny, not the factory. Once"—and the old fellow looked at Jim with a sudden wistfulness—"I, too, thought I should be a writer. I used to try to write books——"

"Oh, Mr. Carkleby——"

"Yes. But that's all in the past. And you're all in the future. And the present. The present first. Well, young fellow, what do you say?"

It is needless to set down the answer. And Carkleby took Jim home in his car.

SO THAT it was not a tragic figure—at least, not hopelessly tragic—that at last stepped over the Brewster threshold and faced the family.

"I know all about it," he said at once, and with a jauntiness that made his mother burst into tears—she was so sure it was feigned to hide a shattered heart—but which Biddy observed with a dawning, if incredulous, conviction. Cleo was her calm self, sure that Jim would always rise triumphant from any disaster—and, besides, the family was affiliated with Mrs. Loftus Lambsweather as effectively through Harold as it would have been through Jim, and Cleo's own position was strengthened thereby in the desired degree.

Then Jim explained his conversation with Carkleby.

He had actually forgotten his play—for ten minutes.

Thus the atmosphere was cleared for the full description of the dramatic event. A smaller, more restricted audience than he had visualized, but, after all, the best—his mother, his sister, who was so proud of him—and the little kid who had helped him—yes, helped him—write his play.

Later, he followed her to her sweet peas, where she had left her watering-pot. As on one other evening, it was bright moonlight.

And suddenly, with a laugh, he referred to that other night and what she had said to him.

She was quite confused.

"I—I was horrid, Jim. And it wasn't what I had meant to say at all. I had meant to say——"

"Well, out with it, Chickabiddy!"

"I had meant to offer you some of my money. But Harold and I had said we wouldn't do that. Harold wanted to lend you money, too. But the will books said lending is as weak as borrowing——"

"The will books! Biddy, do you mean to tell me that you, too——"

She hung her head. Then all at once she laughed. He had never heard her laugh so gaily.

"There aren't any more of them. Harold burned the whole stack. He knows he'll never have any will. The only person round here who's got that sort of will is Dorine. She's got something that can't be learned out of books."

It was the longest and most articulate speech Jim had ever heard her make. And every word of it was true.

And just as true was a much shorter speech he got out of her somewhat later that summer—the speech: "Yes."

The Flight *of* Sadie

If You're Human, You Like Dogs; You've Been Hunting or You'd Like to Go, and You're Interested in Amusing Colored Persons—They're All Here

By Bozeman Bulger

Illustration by Morgan Steinmetz

THE front porch of the Salt Marsh Hunting Club has gone without further description since Clem Parker, colored, some years ago declared it a place where "white gemmun comes to set and think, an', sometimes, jes' set."

This settin'-porch overlooks a noisome stretch of marsh-reed and black, slimy mud, reaching as far as can the eye. Except for occasional flights of mallard, sawbill and blue heron, the only marks on the drab view to the south are dark streaks cut by a tidal river and its estuaries, the latter creeping into the swampy shore of underbrush and palmetto, ever gnawing away at more of the club property. Wild hogs roam the semitropical timber, earning their keep without the aid of man. He can thus eke out a living and remain lazy if he so desires. Mostly, he does.

Clem long ago became the club factotum, as well as residuary legatee of all clothes and small change left by visiting sportsmen. By special appointment of the colonel, old Clem also became sole custodian of Sadie.

There were few hogs like Sadie along the southern coast of Georgia. The colonel's hobby was the raising of wild hogs to make the club self-supporting. In Sadie he saw a great genealogical future for the razorback population of the swamp-lands. She was a red Jersey of aristocratic lineage, selected with meticulous care after much reading and learned discussion by the wealthy globe-trotting colonel. The transportation of the prize animal from Pennsylvania to the club was conducted with even greater care for her comfort and welfare. Sadie, now in her seventh month, was a much pampered Jersey.

The colonel had arrived with a party from New York. Among the guests was Robert Murray, the colonel's personal attorney, persuaded for the first time to get out in the open and see things. The deer-hunting season was closed, but there was still a month for shooting meadow-hens, king-rail, mallard and quail.

The entire party was on the settin'-porch this warm Sunday morning in January, the colonel pointing out at length—particularly to Murray—the many advantages of his beloved hunting club.

"Clem," he called, "bring Sadie round to the front of the house. I want these gentlemen to see a hog that is a hog at her best."

"Yassuh—comin'."

Weighing full two hundred and sixty and clad in khaki, the colonel's hunched-up figure on the top step conveyed the impression of an infantry squad under canvas. Murray, never having lived this outdoor life, was straight as an Indian and athletic. In his prefect-fitting riding-breeches, the like of which Clem had never seen, the New York lawyer easily could have been mistaken for a cavalry officer.

Our settin' was distressingly interrupted.

"Kunnel," announced Clem, coming round the corner of the house, all out of breath, " 'at hog Sadie is gone! Yassuh; dere ain't hair nur hide lef' uv 'er!"

"Sadie gone again? Huh—that's funny. There's been nobody round here to let down that rail fence again, has there?"

"No suh, Kunnel. She must'r broke th'ough and taken to the swamp wid dem wild razahbacks. An', Kunnel, she ain't got er mark on 'er."

"What does he mean—a mark on her?" asked Murray, feeling that, as lawyer, he should show some concern.

"He means her ears aren't marked—branded, you would call it in cattle."

"No, suh; not er mark. 'At Sadie's ears is as smooth en soft as dem on ole Grady, layin' dere."

Murray turned to look at a veteran deer-hound that he had not noticed before, stretched out in the sand in front of the house.

"You see," the colonel made clear, "if a hog goes wild and is not marked before reaching the age of six months, any man finding it on his property can put his own mark on the animal and claim it. That's hog law.

"And I don't mind telling you," he added, "there's a lot of these piny-woods hog-men that haven't any too much conscience about opening up fence-holes. Well," he said resignedly to Clem, "you'd better get the Stickney boys and go after Sadie first thing in the morning, or somebody'll be claiming her. We can't afford to lose that hog."

"Yassuh."

IN THE ensuing discussion, Clem stuck around to glean information as to the extent of the visit and to appraise the Northern party for possibilities in tips and leavings. In so doing, his eyes suddenly focused with interest on Grady. The old dog had begun to move and stretch himself. This veteran hound, his bearing one of extreme dignity, looked about as if gazing into the distance. Laconically he snapped at a droning fly, then turned his attention to the visitors lounging on the steps. Perfunctorily Grady sniffed at Murray's leggings, sized up the colonel and trotted round the lawn.

"Sumpin' wrong wid 'at ole dog, Kunnel," observed Clem. "Ole Grady got sumpin' on his mind. He ain't gittin' up and stirrin' round for nothin'."

The old dog came back to the steps, gazed down the road and started a half-earnest bark that died in his throat—as a dog barks when dreaming.

"That's funny! Look down the road, Clem," directed the colonel from his more elevated position on the porch. "Isn't that Casey Jones coming?"

"It sho' is, Kunnel. I knowed sumpin' was wrong wid old Grady."

In the distance came trotting an old, bluish-gray, fleabitten hound, its floppy ears skimming the ground. Casey Jones had come a distance of five miles from the Stickney place on the other side of the swamp. We old-timers knew he had come to visit Grady. This dog-telepathy, or whatever it is that directs the gathering of dogs at important moments, had been a favorite topic among us for several seasons.

"Oh, get out!" laughed Murray, when this was explained to him. "Being a tenderfoot, I'll stand for a lot; but not for a dog walking five miles to call on another."

"You'll have a lot more to stand for before the day is over," the colonel assured him. "There's something up between those dogs. They have met for a purpose. Don't laugh. It's true, Murray; it may also test your credulity to know that Casey Jones and Grady never associate with any other dogs. They are the dog aristocracy of these parts—both crack deer-trailers, both pack-leaders. They are thoroughbreds and know it. Now, notice how they hold themselves aloof. Just see if they pay any attention to the hog-dogs or the pointers."

"You mean to tell me——"

"Kunnel," suggested Clem, "tell the gemmun 'bout Casey Jones comin' here every night before a deer-hunt widout anybody sendin' for him."

"That's right," affirmed the colonel. "Nobody round here has ever been able to figure it out; but when we get ready to go on a deer-hunt, Casey invariably shows up the night before to be in the chase. We never think of sending for him. Some sort of dog-message informs him. I don't know what it is; but you can bet that old dog is coming to see Grady for some definite purpose."

"Do they know when the season opens

and closes?" asked Murray, a twinkle in his eye.

"Certainly. They know just as well as we do."

"Well, I caught you there," laughed the lawyer. "If Casey knows the season is closed, why is he coming now?"

"Oh, that cuts no figure with them. Those old dogs are natural lawbreakers, and I believe they do it out of pure mischief. Very often they go out and run a buck just for the pure sport of it—law or no law."

Murray looked at Grady, now in an attitude of attention, and smiled. Dog stories and fish yarns were all the same to him.

Casey Jones trotted up to the steps, nosed about a little and, with Grady, walked off to a corner of the lawn. Their manuevers indicated plainly something more tangible than mere exchange of the accepted courtesies between dogs. They turned to look at us inquiringly.

"Which is the better dog?" asked Murray.

"I reck'n Grady is," Clem informed him. "He's got a better nose an' kin strike a trail quicker, but he doan' hang on no better'n Casey. He's whut a gemmun, who was down here, called a striker hound—said he come from stock over in England or some furron country. But neither one uv' 'em'll run a deer past 'at road-crossin' out yonder in de woods. Dey knows huntin' jes' as well as white folks. Ef you is put on 'at stand by de road an' doan' get 'at deer when he comes lopin' by, dem two ole dogs'll quit right dere and come home. Dey figgers dere job is done. Yassuh; dey knows whut's goin' on. More'n dat, ef'n you shoots a deer down, dem two old dogs'll set 'emselves right dere and wait. Dey'll run wid de pack, all right, but dey won't let none of 'em common dogs come near 'at deer."

"Here, Clem! Here's a half-dollar. That's worth it," laughed Murray.

"But, boss," protested the darky, as he thanked the visitor, "I'm tellin' you de God Ermighty's truth. 'At old dog Grady ain't never had no friend outside'n Casey—and Sadie."

"Oh, he'll stand for Sadie, then?"

"Yassuh. When 'at li'l old pig come here first, her an' Grady et together. I reck'n Grady got to think he kind er had charge of her. He knows she's thoroughbred jes' same as we does. He used to watch her an' wouldn't let no other dog even bark at her—common dogs, I mean. You know, boss, Grady and Casey Jones won't trail no wild hog. But they'll keep track of Sadie. It's 'cause she's quality. Dey knows."

"Colonel," Murray called to the host, "this is better than hunting—this stuff Clem is telling me."

"Laugh all you please; but he's telling you the truth," insisted the colonel. "There's more he could tell you. They are liable to run a buck for you any minute."

"I reck'n 'at's whut dey're figgerin' on now, Kunnel. Look at 'em!"

WITH the rest of us, the skeptical Murray walked to the edge of the yard and glanced toward a pea field between the club-house and the rail fence at the edge of the woods. With Grady in the lead, the two old hounds were trotting toward the thick underbrush bordering the swamp.

"Suhtinly is takin' dere time," observed Clem. "'Em two old dogs knows deer lays in dem swamps in de heat uv de day."

Murray turned to look toward the end of the stretch of woods.

"What kind of dog is that?" he asked.

"Suhtinly is funny," said Clem, following Murray's glance that had noted a small dog running in the edge of the pea field. "Kunnel, ain't 'at Mr. Fletch Darrow's ketch-dog, old Spot?"

"Must be," agreed the colonel, shading his eyes to see better. "What do you suppose Darrow's doing round here, Clem? He didn't know our party was coming, did he?"

"No, suh; didn't nobody know it."

"Fletch Darrow is the game-warden," the colonel explained to Murray, "and what I'd call a rather tricky citizen. He owns a piece of hog-land off to the east of us."

In a moment we saw Darrow come out of the woods, making his way toward us. Evidently he had seen us when we spied his ketch-dog. Ahead of him came Spot, a vicious-looking little brute, half hound and half mongrel. Long white scars over his body indicated the nature of his calling—catching wild hogs and throwing them that they may be hog-tied and marked, or carried to a pen for fattening. The ketch-dog never trails, but follows at his master's heels until the exact moment when he is ordered to "go git 'im."

A cut on the side of Spot's muzzle gave to one of his eyes a drooping, wicked expression. He seemed to be regarding us with a tough leer. In the swamp-lands the ketch-dog is the cauliflower-eared pugilist of dog society. Tom Sharkey would call him a tough guy. By the mere nature of his job he is a game guy. Those wild hogs are vicious animals.

"Good morning, Mr. Darrow," the colonel greeted.

"Mornin', Kunnel."

"This is Mr. Murray, Mr. Darrow."

In turn we were introduced. Darrow did not offer to shake hands. His eyes continually shifted.

The lean, hungry-looking Darrow was not in a happy frame of mind. To Clem it was obvious he had been drinking heavily of skimmin's—a liquor distilled from the scum of boiling cane at sirup-making time. To me, though, his attitude was that of a man who had run across a party unexpectedly and was at a loss to know what to say. He and his dog were a sinister-looking pair.

"Kunnel," said Darrow finally, "I come over to see 'bout the licenses. There's been a lot of huntin' going on over here out of season, and I thought I'd better see 'bout that, too."

"Why, we just got here this morning," the colonel told him. "There's been nobody on the place."

"Just the same, there's been deer-runnin'. I kin hear it. But layin' that aside, I reck'n these gentlemen aims to pay their license-fees."

"Most of them are members of the club. The others are not hunters. Club members, as I understand it, are not required to pay non-resident licenses."

"That's the law—yes, sir. But it seems to me that there's a lot of huntin' goin' on without no money bein' paid. I ain't got a cent out'n this place in three months. Everybody in the world ain't a member of this club, is they?"

The colonel was a stickler for observing the game laws. This attitude of Darrow nettled him.

"Our members are not lawbreakers, Mr. Darrow," he said. "I'll personally vouch for that. Are you sure that's all you came over for?"

Darrow's conscience was never any too sure of itself. He was not quite certain what the colonel meant. Meditatively he tugged at his horseshoe-like mustache and spat in the sand. With the toe of his broad brogan shoe he smoothed out a spot in front of him.

JUST then old Grady opened up in the edge of the swamp. He had struck a warm trail. In a second, it seemed, the sharp staccato voice of Casey Jones had joined the heavier, more resonant tones of Grady.

"Whut'd I tell you?" exclaimed Darrow triumphantly. "Ef that ain't deer-runnin', what is it? It's been going on right along over here."

We all listened, our surprise growing into a thrill. It was the first time Murray had heard real hounds on the trail. The broken voices of the dogs gradually blended into a steady, echoing roll—music to a hunter's ear.

" 'At's 'er hot trail 'em ole dogs is struck," Clem informed Murray. "Dey must'r jumped him. It's a big buck, all right. I kin tel from de way dey goes atter him."

The running buck took the hounds off to the east. Occasionally their booming voices were lost in the swales.

"Dey'll bring him back," Clem assured the lawyer, now more interested in the chase than in Darrow.

"I'm askin' you, Kunnel, ain't that deer-runnin' out'n season?" asked the warden.

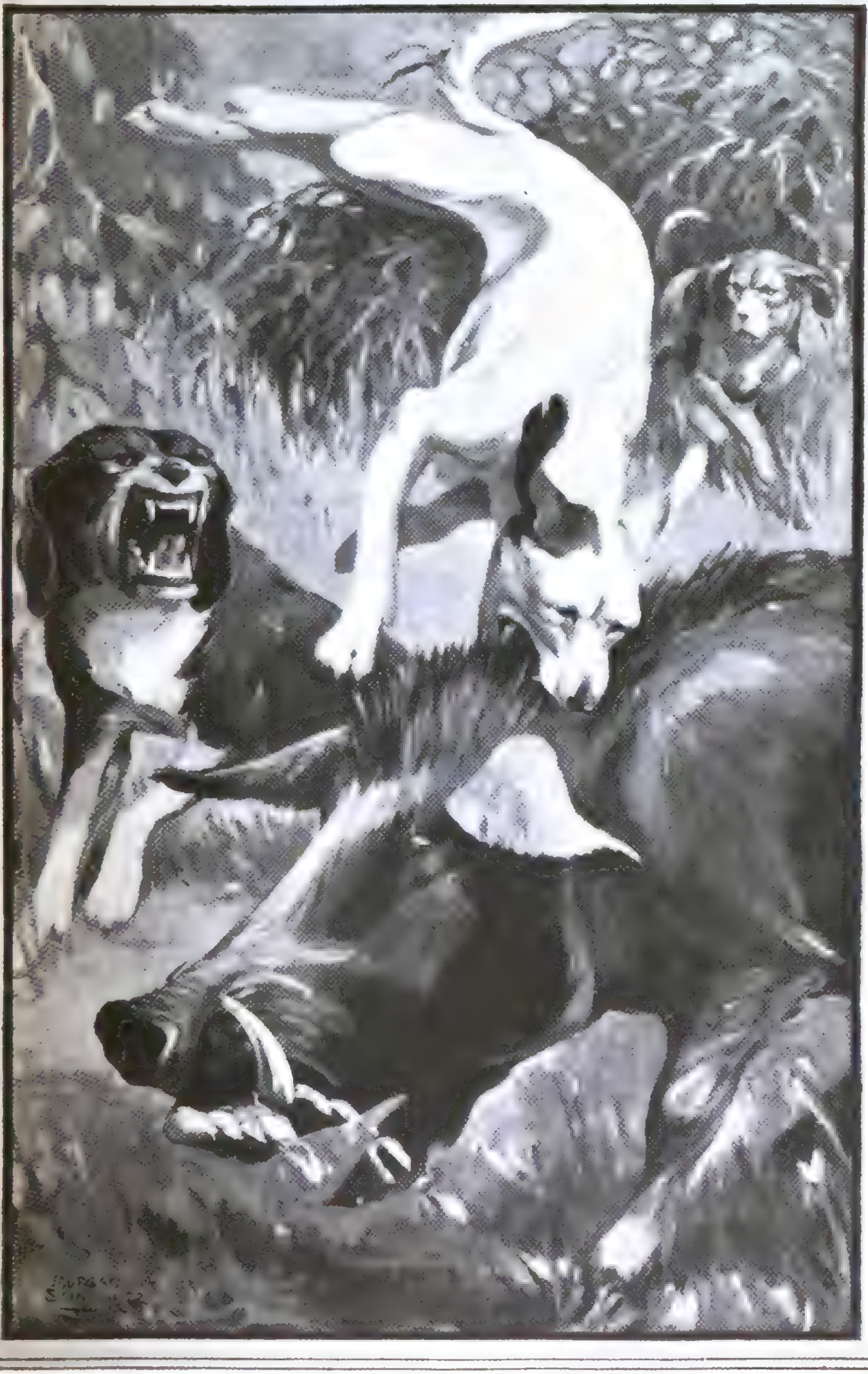
"That's deer-running—yes. But no member of the club is there. Proof is that everybody is here. Those dogs are running that buck just for their own amusement."

"Hell-fire, Kunnel; I've spent nigh onto fifty year round these parts, and nobody's goin' to tell me that dogs go out and have a hunt for theirselves. I reck'n them dogs is members, at that. They ought to pay something, git fined, stopped—something."

The warden shook his head and grinned. For the first time he seemed to be amused. His shifty eyes were a little more human.

"I know what's the matter with you, Darrow," declared the colonel, warming up in a way that nobody could withstand or imitate. "I've got something for what ails you. Come over to the club-house."

"Now you're talkin', Kunnel," he agreed, evidently willing to drop the subject of licenses for the moment.



Spot landed squarely on the back of the boar's neck, biting and tearing at the sharp bristle.

In a few minutes we heard Darrow and the colonel laugh.

"It ain't that I wanter pester you," the warden was saying. "I'm folks the same as you is, but the judge keeps atter me, and I've got to keep track of this huntin'."

The colonel invited Darrow to stay for lunch, saying that he wanted to talk to him about the hog-raising business.

"Clem," Murray said to the darky, as we stood outside and listened, "I'd like to see those dogs run that deer across the road."

"Better not, Mr. Murray," Clem advised. "The kunnel will raise Cain. That Mr. Darrow will git you fined, too. He gits half of what a man's fined."

"How much do they fine you for shooting a deer?"

"Dey fined one gemmun twenty-five dollars. Yassuh; twenty-five dollars in cash."

"I guess it's worth it, at that." Murray was growing more enthusiastic every minute. The hunting-bug had stung him. "I'd give twenty-five to get a crack at that deer. It would be worth five just to get sight of him."

Clem gazed at the ground, studying this proposition thoughtfully. He was also thinking of the colonel. Clem had felt the sting of the colonel's wrath on a previous occasion.

"You heard what I said, didn't you?"

"Yassuh; I'se listenin'. Boss, I'm mightily afeared the kunnel's goin' er make it hot for somebody."

"Here's five on account. See if you can slip my gun out and take it down the road while we are at lunch."

While we were at lunch the darky must have thought long and earnestly.

"Colonel," said Murray, rising from the table, "we are going to take a walk while you and Mr. Darrow talk."

There seemed to be no objection.

"Clem," Murray called, "can you take us out for a walk, so we can hear some more of that hound-music?"

He was evidently determined to go through with what he thought would be a good joke on the colonel and Darrow.

"Yassuh; suttinly kin," said Clem, coming to the porch. "Ef y'all is ready, we'll take de road down by de swamp."

Two hundred yards from the house Murray's gun was found in a clump of alders. We walked a half-mile without hearing the dogs.

"Dey'll be coming round de swamp in a minute," Clem assured us.

Two of us had no guns, but Clem placed us on a stand near the edge of the swamp just the same. Two hundred yards farther, he stationed Murray at the favorite place by the road-opening. My attention was called to the fact that Clem had taken the lawyer much farther back in the bushes than usual. Evidently he was not very anxious to get a real shot at the deer.

Presently we heard the dogs again. They were running steadily, the roll of their voices rising and falling with the lay of the ground. The delicate shading of sound gave one the impression that it was directed by an orchestra leader. There is no music like that.

FEELING certain that the buck would come nowhere near us, we worked round to the rear of Murray and Clem and presently joined them, much to the darky's discomfiture.

We had interrupted a narrative that would have gone better on the tenderfoot alone. For a half-hour there was dead quiet in the woods. Not a sound came from the dogs.

Then we heard Grady and Casey Jones open up four or five hundred yards to the rear of us. They were not giving tongue in unison. We could hear a long baying note in the deep voice of Grady, then a plaintive whine, interrupted by the sharp bark of Casey.

"Those dogs are not running, Clem," my companion said to the darky. "That buck should have passed here a half-hour ago."

Though he tried to hide it, Clem was plainly annoyed over the presence of some one who knew dogs.

"Jes' a minute, boss."

Rising, Clem cupped his hands to his mouth and let forth a shrill "Yee-e-e-hoo-o-oo-ah!"

The call rolled and echoed through the woodland and swamp. Again and again he repeated this indescribable call or yelp, his voice carrying like the blast from a hunter's horn. It was a call of encouragement, indication of a hunter's presence that means so much to a dog.

Murray marveled at the instant response of the hounds, far away. Their voices picked up to a loud, steady beat. It was evident, though, that they were not moving in one direction—evident after my expert companion had called attention to it.

"No, suh; 'em dogs ain't runnin'," announced Clem. "I reck'n dey's trailin'."

"Trailing nothing! They've got something bayed," said my companion, looking at the darky sharply.

"Yassuh; I reck'n 'at's it."

"You mean to say they've quit running the deer?" asked Murray.

"Yassuh; dem dogs must'r got de wind off'n Mr. Darrow."

"Off Mr. Darrow?"

"Yassuh; 'at's de God's truth," affirmed Clem, noticing that we had turned our heads. "Yassuh; 'em two ole dogs knows it's de closed season, jes' same as us do. Minute dey gits scent of dat warden, dey quits right den and dere."

Murray stretched out on the ground to laugh.

"Boss, I ain't lyin' to you. Dem two ole dogs is got more sense 'n most folks. Dey ain't goin' be ketched breakin' no law. No sirree! Grady and Casey is up to sumpin' right now. Dogs kin fiddle round and lie out'n things jes' like colored folks. I knows."

"All right, Clem," said Murray; "I guess you've earned your five dollars whether we ever see that buck or not."

The darky stopped suddenly, listening intently. The dogs were baying steadily.

"Dey ain't trailin' now, gemmun," he declared with finality. "Dem ole dogs is got sumpin' sho. Dey're glued whar dey is."

"Come on; let's see what it is."

"Yassuh; we's goin'— Look, boss! Didn' I tell you? Dere's Mr. Darrow an' de kunnel over yonder in de edge of dat field now."

This darky had the eye of an eagle. We looked in the direction he was pointing and finally made out Darrow and the colonel nearly a half-mile away.

" 'At ketch-dog Spot is wid 'em, too," Clem informed us.

"What do you suppose they are up to?"

"Don't know, suh; but de kunnel didn' keep 'at Mr. Darrow to dinner for nuthin'. Kunnel's mighty smart man. He's findin' out sumpin, wotever it is. But, boss, les's be goin'. Dem ole dogs is goin'r show you sumpin yit."

They were going to show us more than Clem anticipated.

WE STARTED, Murray bringing up the rear and still laughing about the dogs getting Darrow's scent. He still carried his rifle, and Clem advised him to walk in front. Like all woodsmen, Clem was afraid of a tenderfoot behind him with a gun.

We made our way through a thick undergrowth of palmettos, scrub-oak and pine. Keeping a sure foot among the gnarled roots of palmetto is no easy job. The sharp, spinelike leaves cut sharply, but we kept going. We must have covered four hundred yards when the dogs appeared to be still that far away. The cover was getting thicker.

"Keep 'at gun ready, Mr. Murray," advised Clem, as we tore through the brush. "It mout be er bear. Sho is tough goin'. When dogs goes into dis rough hollow for huntin', it's sumpin' perticklar."

As we neared the dogs, we came out into a sort of clearing. The palmettos gave way to small, clumpy pines. The ground, covered with pine-needles, made the walking easier. The dogs, though, were down in what appeared to be a thick brier patch on the edge of a little marshy brook. At our approach we could hear them whining plaintively, eager to get at something they had cornered.

"Dere dey is," announced Clem, "right in dat brier patch! Better stop a minit and ketch yo' breath."

We were all quite willing for a breathing-spell. Our clothes were pricked by the needles, and perspiration poured down our faces.

"Talk to him, Grady!" Clem called to the dog. "Here we is, Casey! Doggone!"

The dogs responded, baying violently and thrashing in the bushes, which swayed as they moved about in a circle. We could not see their bodies, the cover was so thick.

Murray grew impatient. He started into the thick brush to investigate.

We heard an ominous, angry grunt.

"Watch out, Mr. Murray!" warned Clem. "Back out'n dere!"

Murray's pulling at the bushes excited the dogs, and they barked more viciously.

There was a sudden chorus of angry grunts and coughs.

"Watch yoself, Mr. Murray! Jump!"

The darky, unusually animated, ran round to the other side and shook violently at a small bush—a lucky thought.

There was a terrifying snarling, grunting and crashing of brush. Out came a big boar, followed by three or four of his tribe. Emitting angry little coughs, the wild hog barely missed Murray as he turned toward Clem and the shaking bush. Experience saved the darky. He threw his hat down where he had been standing and leaped over to Murray, yanking the lawyer, who had fallen at the charge of the boar, to his feet.

In the mean time, the angry animal, his beadlike eyes flaming and mouth foaming, sank his tusks into Clem's hat and threw it up over his head. He turned, full of fight, barking gutturally and snapping his teeth.

"Run, Mr. Murray; run!" Clem shouted. No second urge was needed. "Drop yo' hat!"

The boar made for the hat, on which to vent its rage. My companion and I by this time were fully one hundred feet away. Murray and Clem soon were nearly that far.

"Keep spread out," directed the darky. "Dere ain't no trees, or I'd tell you to climb. But he won't come far in de open."

The dogs kept up a yelping in the background. They made no effort to attack the boar. He turned toward them and then toward us. Evidently the beast was confused, uncertain which way to attack. That was why Clem wanted us scattered.

Though I knew these swamp-lands to be full of wild hogs, I had never seen one of the vicious old boars before. The tusks on this fellow were easily four inches long, curved upward like an ivory scythe. He seemed to be all head, the bristles standing up between his ears and along his neck, like a stove-brush.

"Set the dogs on him, Clem!" we yelled.

"No, suh; not 'em two ole dogs. Dey ain't goin'r tackle no boar."

"Yes; and I thought you said they wouldn't trail a wild hog."

"Dey won't, boss. It's sumpin' else. Dey ain't projec'in' wid 'at ole boar—no, suh!"

Again the boar got nervous. As he rocked from side to side, his beadlike eyes had spied us. Clem heaved a big stick into the copse, causing the beast to turn and snap. One of the dogs ventured out. Instantly the boar dashed for him.

All this time Murray held the rifle. To use it had never occurred to him. The lawyer had a bad case of buck-fever—rather, boar fever.

The hog bore down on Grady, the old hound unsuspecting the attack as he came out of the matted undergrowth. Grady sidestepped just in time. Those tusks would have ripped him from muzzle to stern. He turned and snarled. Both were out in the open now.

"Lord Ermighty, boss!" exclaimed Clem. "He'll git ole Grady sho. Watch——"

"Go git 'im, Spot!"

In the excitement of our first boar-hunt, we had not heard the approach of Darrow and the colonel.

The sharp command of the warden was followed by what appeared to be a grayish white streak flashing toward the boar.

"My God"—Murray started—"that little dog isn't going—" But he never finished the sentence.

Spot, little pugilist of the swamp-lands, saw his opportunity as he leaped. He knew nothing of fear.

WE WERE treated to a spectacle that is permitted to few tenderfeet.

The boar's attention having been directed to Grady, Spot landed squarely on the back of his neck, biting and tearing at the sharp bristle. It was a bad hold. The boar whirled, throwing Spot fully five feet. The hog, thoroughly confused and frenzied, again started for Grady, who was backing off to safety. The little ketch-dog gathered himself together, made a couple of feint-moves and dived directly between the boar's front legs. With a snap that sounded like the click of a pair of handcuffs, the brave little fighter sank his fangs into the throat of the boar. For a moment it was a struggle of David and Goliath. Spot had a bulldog grip.

Again and again he threw the boar to the ground, the two rolling over and over. I have never seen such gameness, even in a pit-terrier.

Unable to use its tusks, the boar used its sharp hoofs in an effort to shake off the ketch-dog. The overpowering strength of the hog was bound to wear down the strength of the dog, it seemed. There was a wild heave, and we could see that one of the sharp hoofs had scratched Spot's shoulder. The two hounds snarled viciously, but dared not come near.

Realizing that his position was bad, so Darrow told us afterward, the ketch-dog was maneuvering to get a hold on the nose or ear. The ear is a tender spot in the wild boar. At the next stab of the knifelike hoof, Spot turned loose. He had misjudged his snap for the ear by the fraction of an inch. The boar whirled and, for the first time, used his tusks. With an upward rip he caught the little ketch-dog in the fore shoulder, cutting an ugly gash two inches long. The dog rolled over and over to escape a second attack. It was evident that he would be unable to rise in time. Darrow sensed this before we did.

"Hey! Hey! Hey!" he yelled at the top of his voice, hurling his hat at the hog. The boar hesitated for just one instant, his mouth frothing.

"Bang!"

None of us had noticed Murray. His rifle had been leveled on the boar for several minutes. He fired just as the animal turned sidewise. And it was no tenderfoot shot. The bullet struck just back of the head and broke the boar's neck. The big beast dropped as if hit with a poleax—dead.

This unexpected finish was startling.

"What's you do that for?" demanded Darrow, plainly irritated.

Spot was just getting to his feet, limping painfully.

"My God, man, I wasn't going to see a dog as game as that butchered! That boar would have killed him sure."

"Sho he would," agreed Darrow. "I reck'n it was all right," he drawled; "but when we puts a ketch-dog in a fight with a hog, we most generally lets him go through with it. When one gits killed, we calls it a good record and raises up a new one. Was good shootin', though."

Murray looked at the man in astonishment. Here was a point of view that he would never be able to comprehend—the survival of the fittest, as the caveman knew it. At that, he recognized a vague sort of sportsmanship in giving the boar an even break.

The ketch-dog, now on his feet and licking the ugly wound, moved over to the dead boar and began to sniff. Grady and Casey Jones had disappeared in the brush, whining, occasionally letting out a shrill bark.

The finish of the boar-fight, the death of the hog, the wounding of Spot seemed of little moment to Darrow.

He bit off a chew of tobacco and spat reflectively.

"Now, how 'bout that deer-huntin' over here?" he inquired of Murray.

"We didn't shoot any deer," the lawyer told him. "Did you hear a shot?"

"There don't have to be no shot. Pursuin' deer is jes' as much agin the law as shootin' one."

"Why—er——"

"Lawd er mercy, boss," quickly interrupted Clem, who had moved over by the colonel, whose face had taken on a peculiar expression which Clem understood; " 'em dogs wasn't runnin' no deer——"

"Don't lie to me, nigger! Don't you reck'n I know when hounds open up on er trail?"

"No suh, Mr. Darrow, ole Clem ain't goin'r lie to nobody. Dem ole dogs ain't even studied 'bout no deer."

The darky could feel Murray studying his face. Guiltily he fumbled the lawyer's money in his pocket. We had to smile at Clem's cupidity. There seemed to be something understood between the colonel and the darky. Darrow felt it, too.

"But they wuz runnin' jes' the same," the warden stubbornly insisted.

"No, suh, not no deer—jes axe Mr. Murray. He ain't seen hair nor hide of no deer. I knowed 'em dogs had pertickler business on when I sees Casey come over frum de Stickneys'. Dey mout'r struck er wildcat's trail, but de minit I hollers dey pulls off and goes right on wid dere business. 'Em dogs knowed you wuz round de place, Mr. Darrow."

The warden sensed something wrong. He looked at the colonel uneasily.

JUST then Grady and Casey came out of the copse in a crash of barking, intermingled with the frightened grunting of a hog. Ahead of them ran Sadie, waddling from one cover to another on her short little Jersey legs.

"Doggone!" yelled the negro. "Yas, suh; 'at's whut dey was atter. 'At's our ole house-hog, Sadie. Look, Kunnel; ain't nobody marked her yit, neither."

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1922

"Well, gents," said Darrow, "I reck'n I'll be goin'——"

"Watch her, Clem!" my companion shouted. "Keep her headed toward the house."

" 'At's whut 'em two ole dogs is tryin'r do now. But dey cain't drive no hog."

Darrow stopped, and we all formed a semicircle round Sadie in an effort to head her in the right direction. It was no use.

All the time the little ketch-dog was limping and whining, though thoroughly interested in what seemed to be a new chase.

To drive that pet Jersey through the thick underbrush was impossible. We soon found that out.

"Ain't no use," declared Darrow. "Better ketch her and hog-tie her."

"Who's going to catch her?" asked the colonel, puffing.

"Come 'ere, Spot!" called the warden. "He'll throw her," he said to us.

"No, no!" objected the colonel. "I don't want that hog cut up. Besides, your dog is too crippled and too weak. That would be a shame."

Darrow laughed.

"He ain't goin'r hurt her, Colonel, an' he ain't goin'r git hurt, neither. Spot could ketch a hog like that with one leg tied. Watch 'im. Go git 'im, Spot!" he called to the ketch-dog.

Though painfully hurt, the little pugilist recognized his duty, started.

"Easy now—go easy, boy!" Darrow cautioned.

AT THE appearance of Spot, the hounds backed away. Forgetting his wounds, the ketch-dog moved quickly to Sadie's side, trotting with her and waiting for a good chance.

"Now!" snapped Darrow.

Like a snake darting out its head, the clever little brute clamped its jaws on Sadie's right ear. Sadie was not a fighter. With a squeal of terror she turned right over on her side at Spot's pull. In a second Clem was on top of her.

" 'At'll do, Spot!" called Darrow. He reached in his pocket for the roll of cord that all hog-men carry and tossed it to Clem. Darrow seemed to have an abundance of it.

In two minutes Sadie's legs were tied hard and fast. She lay there grunting.

"Sendin' Spot after a hog like that," laughed Darrow, "is like using buckshot on a wren."

Catching the game little dog, Darrow rubbed some kind of oil or grease on the shoulder-wound and allowed he'd be all right in a couple of days.

"Better save them tusks," advised the warden, starting away through the woods. "Them's the biggest I've seen. They's worth keepin'."

The warden was gone. The colonel watched his retreating figure with a queer little smile on his face.

"Forgot about the licenses, hasn't he?" he observed.

Clem lifted Sadie to his shoulder, and our procession started back through the bushes, Casey and Grady trotting lazily behind. At the first crossing of the woods-roads Casey Jones stopped. He looked long and earnestly at Grady. Then he glanced at Sadie on Clem's back. His mind being satisfied that his job was done, the Stickney hound left us, trotting down the road to the left and to his home. His visit was over.

"We'll take this route," said the colonel, turning toward a little trail that led to the rail fence surrounding the pea field. "I want to show you folks something—you doubting Thomases!"

About fifty yards along the fence to the left of the path the colonel, who was leading, stopped and beckoned to us.

The rails had been moved so as to make a hole large enough for a man to crawl through, to say nothing of a hog. Evidently no animal had done that, and it could not have been an accident.

"This is where Grady and Casey started their trail," said the colonel. "It is also where Spot came through when we started out to find you." He called our attention to several footprints made by a large flat shoe. "And I guess none of you wear brogans."

We began to understand.

"Now," declared the colonel, looking straight into Murray's eye, "I suppose you are prepared to believe that Grady and Casey didn't get together just to pass the time of day."

"They win, Colonel," the lawyer admitted. "But what about that license stuff?"

"Oh, that was Darrow's alibi for being caught in our woods."

The Story of a Struggle to Be Decent—
A Story That Contains a Challenge

GODLESS VALLEY

Douglas Asks Himself the Question That, Sooner or Later, Every Male Asks: What Does the Girl I Love Think of Men of the Loose Type—Men Like John?

By Honoré Willsie

Author of "Still Jim," "The Enchanted Canyon," etc.

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr

THERE was one thing on which Douglas Spencer was determined—and which he would fight for with all the passionate courage of his youthful heart—and that was that Judith, his stepsister, should not attend the fall rodeo at Mountain City unless her mother went with her. The boy was only eighteen, but for some time he had been in love with the now sixteen-year-old daughter of his father's second wife, and had set himself the task of bringing her safely through the perilous years that must be traveled in such surroundings as the Lost Chief folks had created. Only too well did he understand the libertine nature of his father, John Spencer, and he feared the influence of Scott Parson, one of the turbulent spirits of the valley, upon whom Judith was inclined to look with favor.

These two were typical of the rest of the little community. It consisted of descendants of pioneers from New England who had failed to hand down the fear of God and their traditional moral ideals. Lost Chief Valley, high up in the Wyoming Rockies, was now peopled mainly by crass materialists. The hard life of horse- and cattle-raising had made them confirmed agnostics and worse, and some years before they had shown their contempt for old-fashioned orthodox theology by driving a preacher from their midst.

An exception or two to this trend of mind might be discovered. The fires of simple faith still flickered in kindly old Grandma Brown, who was chief ministrant to the sick, who brought the Lost Chief babies into the world and buried the dead. And they burned perhaps more strongly in Peter Knight, the postmaster, in whom a little of the Puritan strain and a good deal of refinement had somehow managed to survive. But such influence as they might exert was more than counterbalanced by the preaching and practise of such men as John Spencer and the frankly atheistic Charleton Falkner.

No wonder, then, that the women drank and swore and were sophisticated almost from the cradle, although the conventional moral code of their sex was not entirely abandoned. They might wink at such relations as, gossip had it, existed between Jimmy Day, the sheriff's son, and little Marian Falkner, provided that marriage would finally result, but of loose living they were decidedly intolerant, a fact which Inez Rodman, the valley's sole exception in this respect, was daily made to realize.

Judith was not different from her sisters. Wilful, headstrong, she deeply resented every effort of Douglas to restrain the promptings of her wild nature. She could rope a steer more expertly than most of the men, and her skill in handling cattle was the cause of the present clash with her youthful mentor.

A much prized invitation had come to participate in the Mountain City rodeo—the year's great event in that region—and her stepfather promised to take her. It was then that Douglas interfered.

"Judith's not going unless her mother goes."

Judith sniffed.

"Her master's voice again! You'd better horn out of this, Douglas."

"I haven't any intention of keeping out," the boy said quietly but decisively.

But when John Spencer promised to provide Judith with a wonderful outfit, Douglas felt that his task was hopeless.

Peter Knight was present during the scene. He managed to get Douglas out to the horse-shed.

"Keep your fool mouth shut, Doug," he admonished. "You've got from now to September first to side-track this thing."

Douglas was not the least comforted by the suggestion. He would go back and continue the argument with his father and Judith.

DOUGLAS strode out of the shed and up the fence, followed by Peter on Yankee.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, dad—" he began furiously.

"Then don't start something you can't see the finish of," interrupted Judith. "Let me run my own affairs, Doug."

"That's sound advice." John's voice was cool. "I don't want to quarrel with you, either. But I'm still master of my own ranch, and, by God, I'll knock you down if you interfere in this!"

Peter leaned over and put his hand on Douglas's shoulder.

"Don't be a fool, Doug! Go off and think before you talk."

Douglas stood tense for a moment under Peter's kindly hand; then he turned on his heel and clanked into the house, where he threw himself down on his bed.

The old, futile bitterness was on him again, and he was quite as bitter at Judith as at his father. Of what could the girl be thinking? She knew as well as Doug or Peter what wild desires were thinly cloaked by John's beguiling voice. What did girls think about men like John—or any other men, for that matter? If only there was some woman to whom he might go for advice. Grandma Brown? No; he had talked to her once, and she had failed him. Charleton's wife had failed with her own daughter. There remained Inez Rodman, who knew Judith better than any one else knew her. Inez! But he felt sure that the woman of the yellow cañon had forgotten what she had thought and felt at sixteen. And, after all, he did not want again to see life through Inez's eyes. Long after the rest of the family slept, Douglas pursued his weary and futile self-examination, coming to a blind wall at the end.

The next day John mentioned casually that he and Judith had settled on taking the trip to Mountain City together. Douglas made no comment. Not that he had any intention of allowing Judith to make the trip under such circumstances, but he knew that, for the present, he could only bide his time.

Lost Chief was very proud of Judith's invitation and deeply interested in her preparations for the contest. Late in the afternoon, when Judith worked in the corral with Sioux and Whoop-la, it seldom happened that one of Lost Chief's riders was not perched on the fence, watching and advising her, and assuring her with frank pessimism that she had no chance of winning a prize.

"Every prize by now has been doled out to the regulars," Jimmy Day told her one afternoon. "But you should worry! You'll have the grand stand with you every minute, if the judges aren't."

"It'll be the big event of my life, whether I win or not," said Judith. She was leaning, panting, against the gate on which Doug and Jimmy were sitting. "How is it we don't see little Marian any more? I don't remember her at the rodeo."

"She's been tied close home. You know her mother's been up to Mountain City for a month."

"Tied close nothing!" jibed Judith. "Little Marian was never tied close to anything in her life. Come to think of it, I haven't seen little Marian since the haying season began."

"Well, Carleton's been out after wild horses ever since the rodeo," said Jimmy.

"So you and little Marian have been batching it!" mused Douglas. "Hang Charleton! He promised to take me out after wild horses."

"We expect he'll be gone a long time." Jimmy mounted his horse.

"When are you folks going to be married?" asked Douglas.

Jimmy turned his roan homeward.

"I don't know," he answered soberly.

"I wish I could have gone with Charleton," said Douglas, watching Judith as she rubbed Sioux's forehead.

"Charleton! I never did see why you were so crazy about him."

"I'm not any more. Long ago I thought he knew more about how a fellow would get happiness out of life than any one else. Then I found out he don't know a thing more than the rest of us."

"Nobody in the valley knows as much as Inez."

"Do you call her happy?"

"Gee, no! She's awful sad. That's why she knows what real happiness is."

"Jude, how do you suppose Inez will end up?"

"Over in the cemetery, in a coyote-proof grave, like the rest of us. And I ask you, Doug, since that's the end of it, why worry?"

"That's the very reason. Life's so short, and if we don't find happiness here, we are clean out of luck forever."

Judith's gaze wandered from the boy's wistful face to the eternal crimson and orange clouds rolling across Fire Mesa.

"Outside of my riding," she said slowly, "I get most happiness out of my eyes."

Douglas followed her gaze.

"Inez likes the mesa, too," he said.

Judith nodded.

"She got me to using my eyes years ago. She's a funny person. Reads almost nothing but poetry. She's got one she always quotes when she and I are looking at Fire Mesa."

"What is it?" asked Douglas.

"I don't know but one verse.

"A fire-mist and a planet,
  A crystal and a cell,
A jellyfish and a saurian,
  And caves where the cavemen dwell.
Then a sense of law and beauty
  And a face turned from the clod;
Some call it Evolution
  And others call it God!"

"I didn't know Inez had got religious," Douglas said, when Judith finished.

"She hasn't. She doesn't believe anything except that beauty is right and ugliness is wrong."

"Then she'd better clean up her dooryard!" exclaimed Douglas.

"Oh, darn it!" sighed Judith. "I can't even discuss poetry with you without your heaving a brick."

"I'm not heaving bricks. Oh, Judith, I'm so devilishly unhappy!"

"You ought to quit thinking so much and have something you are crazy about doing."

"I'm crazy about something, all right. Judith, don't you think you're ever going to care about me?"

"I don't know, Doug. Who does know—at sixteen?"

"I did."

"I wouldn't marry a man that expected me to be a ranch-wife in Lost Chief if I loved him black in the face." Judith jumped down from the fence and turned Whoop-la free for the night.

Douglas sat staring at her, wondering whether or not to mention the subject of the trip to Mountain City. But he decided that he could not end their friendly conversation with a row, and he clambered down and went about his chores.

AND so the days passed and the time grew close for the trip to Mountain City. One evening, two days before the start, Douglas and Judith went to call on little Marian and Jimmy. When they reached the ranch-house, they found little Marian in the big bed in the living-room and Jimmy sitting beside the unshaded lamp, reading to her.

"Well!" exclaimed Douglas. "What's happened to you, Marian?"

Marian put back her great braid of hair, but what answer she might have made they were not to know, for at that moment Charleton returned from his wild-horse hunt. Dust-covered and sunburned, he strode into the room with a pleasant grin.

"Hello, folks! Why, Marian, are you sick?"

"Kind of. What luck, dad?"

"Fair. Brought in a good stallion and some weedy stuff. How's the ranch, Jimmy?" He asked this with eyes still on his daughter.

"O. K., Charleton," replied Jimmy.

"You made a long trip, Charleton," said Douglas.

"Left the day after the rodeo. What do you hear from your mother, Marian?"

"She's well, and so's the baby. They'll be home any time now."

"What's the matter with you, Marian?"

"Oh, I'm sort of used up."

"How do you mean, 'used up'? I don't like your looks. I'm not a fool, you know."

Marian burst into tears.

"You know what it is!"

Charleton made a sudden spring at Jimmy, but Douglas caught him.

"Hold on, Charleton!" cried Doug. "If things have gone wrong, you're as much to blame as any one."

"You clear out of here, Doug!" shouted Charleton.

"Don't you go, Doug and Judith," sobbed Marian. "I need some one to stand by me."

"I'm standing by you, Marian," said Jimmy, who had not stirred from his chair. "I'd just as soon you'd beat me up, Charleton—a little sooner. But that isn't going to help matters."

Charleton stood glaring at his prospective son-in-law.

"Come off, Charleton!" cried Douglas disgustedly. "You are a fine one to raise trouble over a situation like this. Strikes me you've done everything you could do to bring it about."

Charleton did not seem to hear. His face was cold and hard.

"Marian, you and Jimmy pack up and get out of here!"

"I can't, dad; I'm too sick," sobbed the girl.

"Sick or no sick, you get out of here!"

"Don't you do it, Marian!" cried Judith. "No man's got a right to act so at a time like this. I'll stick by you. Jimmy, you go get Grandma Brown."

Jimmy rushed out of the house.

"Now, Doug," Judith went on, walking over to take Marian's hand, "you and Charleton go on out while I have a talk with Marian."

"This happens to be my house," said Charleton. "Marian, get up and get out!"

"I can't," repeated the girl.

"You're a fine guy to tell a fellow how to live on wine, women and horses!" exclaimed Douglas, "and then raise the devil when your chickens come home to roost."

Charleton gave Douglas an ugly look.

"I'll settle with you for that, young fellow!" He stepped toward the bed. "Are you going to get out, Marian?"

"No, she isn't!" snapped Douglas. He made a sudden rush at Charleton and pushed him into the kitchen. Judith slammed and locked the door behind them.

IT WAS on this scene that John Spencer appeared, closing the outer door innocently behind him.

"I wanted to borrow your buckboard for a couple of weeks—" he began. Then he paused and looked up inquiringly.

"Marian's in trouble," said Douglas, "and Charleton is trying to drive her out. Jude and I won't let him."

"Why should you butt in?" demanded John.

"Anybody with a decent heart would."

"Get your kids out of here, John!" roared Charleton. "Judith's in there with the door locked."

"Judith," called John, "come here!"

"I can't, dad. I promised Marian to stick by her."

"You come out or I'll break the door down and bring you."

"If you do, I'll not go to Mountain City with you."

John hesitated, though his face was purple.

"You couldn't keep her away from that rodeo, and you know it," sneered Charleton. "Fetch her out, John, unless you're afraid of Doug."

"Jude, are you coming?" shouted John.

"No, sir."

John heaved himself against the flimsy door and it broke on its hinges. He rushed into the inner room. Judith, her great eyes blazing, stood with one hand on Marian's shoulder.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, dad? You put a finger on me or Marian if you dare!"

"Don't touch her, dad!" Doug's voice had the old note of warning in it.

But John, furious that his children should be defying him in public, was quite beyond any effort at self-control. He rushed on toward the bed.

"You blank, blank!" screamed Judith. "You aren't fit to touch Marian's feet!"

John seized Judith's arm. Quick as a

lynx cat, Douglas leaped across the room, seized his father from behind and was dragging him toward the door when Grandma Brown came in.

"Now," she cried sternly, "what does this mean? Every one of you get out of here as fast as your feet will carry you."

John stood up sheepishly, Douglas eying him belligerently.

"Look here, Grandma"—Charleton shook his finger in the old lady's face—"I want you to understand that——"

"Understand!" shrilled Grandma. "Understand! You have the face to try to say anything to me, Charleton Falkner?"

Charleton put a cigarette between his teeth, handed one to John, and, John at his heels, walked out.

"You and Douglas go home, Judith," said Grandma briskly. "Jimmy, I want a talk with little Marian. You put that door back on the hinges, then disappear."

SO JUDITH and Douglas rode away. It was a heavenly night with more than a hint of frost in the air.

They rode in silence till John galloped up and pushed Beauty between them.

"I hope you two fools feel better!" he shouted. "You've got a row going with Charleton."

"Lots I care!" chuckled Judith. "I'll sick Grandma Brown on him again if he bothers me."

"I've a notion not to take you up to Mountain City, and I wouldn't if——"

Judith interrupted him.

"You're not going to take me. I'm going with Doug."

"Oh, no, you're not!" snarled John.

"And I'm not going to quarrel with you," Judith went on. "I'm sick of men. I don't like the way you acted to me to-night. I told you if you broke that door down I wouldn't go with you, and I always keep my word. I'm not going to take money from Douglas, either. I'll borrow from Inez. And I don't want to hear another word from you about it."

She put the spurs to Buster and was gone into the starlight. The men spurred after her, but she reached the home corral before they did. And John could storm only at the deeply perturbed Mary, for Doug and Judith went to bed and were heard no more that night.

The next morning before breakfast, half of Lost Chief had called the Spencers on the telephone to tell them that little Marian had a daughter. The dominant note in the reports was one of huge laughter. Judith was serene, and so was John. But the serenity was not to last. When she went out to the corral to look after Sioux, she came back stormily.

"Where's Sioux and Whoop-la?" she demanded of John, who was mending a spur-strap.

"Put away."

"Have you killed them?"

"No; I'll produce them as soon as you agree to keep your promise to go to Mountain City with me."

"I never promised. I intended to go with you, but I never promised."

"Remember, if we don't get started by to-morrow," warned John, "we can't get there in time."

"I said I wouldn't go with you after last night, and now I wouldn't go with you if you were the last man on earth."

She rushed from the house and Douglas followed her.

"I'll help you hunt for them, Judith," he said.

She turned on him, white to the lips.

"We're not going to hunt for them. There are other Mountain City rodeos coming. If he thinks I'm going to make a joke of myself rushing round the neighborhood after my outfit, he's mistaken. I'm not a child. Don't bother me; I'm going to Inez."

She put Buster to the gallop and was off.

Douglas went into the house and stood before his father.

"Dad, that's a rotten deal to put over on Judith."

John rose slowly to his full height.

"Doug, you keep out of this or I'll forget you are my son. You're smart, and you've got a bossy way with you. But I'm still master here. There never was a Spencer that did not rule his own family. I'm going to break that highty-tighty filly, and, by God, she knows it!"

"You'll never break her while I'm alive," said Douglas, and he left the house before his father could reply.

A number of people rode up during the morning to see the start for Mountain City. They found the ranch deserted, except for Mary, who pleaded a sick-headache and refused to talk. Inez had no such reticence, however, and at the 'post-office that night Judith's troubles ran neck and neck in popular interest with little Marian's. Both situations were of a nature to appeal to Lost Chief's sense of humor. Douglas appeared during the session and learned that Charleton's wife had come home.

"I hope she won't go crazy, too," he said.

"No danger!" Peter tossed a letter to Frank Day. "Charleton'll be in line by to-morrow."

"Plumb unnecessary, the whole affair," grunted the sheriff. "I suppose the next thing on the program will be a big wedding."

"I guess they'll manage it like the Browns did," volunteered young Jeff, squirting his quid accurately to the center of the hearth. "Be around borrowing my car in two or three weeks, run up to Mountain City to be married, then give a big party upstairs here, and nobody the worse off for anything."

Everybody nodded and grinned. Douglas sat on a pile of mail-order catalogues smoking, his hat on the back of his head, his eyes thoughtful.

"Anybody know how Jimmy's been behaving to-day?" he asked.

Frank Day laughed heartily.

"I rode up there this morning after I heard the news, friendly like, of course. Grandma had Jimmy out in the yard washing baby-dresses, while she stood in the door giving him what for. Jimmy was dribbling cigarette ashes over the suds, but he sure was game. He grinned and got red when he saw me. 'I'm the henpeckedest damn fool in the Rockies,' he says."

There was a roar of laughter.

"What was Charleton doing?" asked young Jeff, wiping his eyes.

"I found him in the corral. He'd slept in the alfalfa stack, and he wasn't quoting poetry. I didn't stay with him but a minute."

Again there was laughter.

"Big Marian will calm him," said Peter.

"I know one thing!" exclaimed Douglas. "None of us will be saying the things to Charleton we've been saying behind his back."

"We sure won't!" agreed Frank. "I suppose Judith's all broke up, poor little devil!"

Douglas nodded.

"I saw her and Inez hobnobbing in the Rodmans' corral to-day," said young Jeff. "She'd better cut Inez out."

Douglas stared at the familiar faces round the room—all good fellows, and all as helpless before the nameless mystery of life as Doug himself. The sweat started to his forehead. He rose, pulling on his gloves.

"It's early yet, Doug," said Peter.

"I'm going to call for Judith," replied Douglas. He went out, whistled to Prince, mounted the Moose and galloped across to the west trail.

IT WAS sharp and frosty, but Inez and Judith in mackinaws were sitting on the back steps with a little fire of chips at their feet. Douglas dismounted and came into the fire-glow.

"Ready to come home, Jude, old girl?" he asked.

"Sit down and talk to us a little, Douglas," suggested Inez.

Douglas hauled up a broken wagon-seat and sat down. Prince crawled up beside him and went to sleep.

"I suppose Congress was sitting at the post-office to-night," said Judith.

"Yes; everybody's strong for you and little Marian."

"I don't see why I should be bunched with her. Not that I care, though!" Judith tossed her head.

"I swear some one ought to give John Spencer a good thrashing!" exclaimed Inez.

"Don't worry." Judith spoke through set teeth. "I'll be even with him some day."

"I'd just as soon try to lick him," said Doug; "but what good would it do?"

The three sat in silence for a moment, then Douglas asked suddenly,

"Inez, do you believe that poetry about the fire-mist that you taught Judith?"

"No; but I think it's a beautiful poem just the same."

"Say it all for me, will you, Inez?"

Inez, in her soft contralto, repeated the lines.

"And you don't believe it?" Douglas's voice was wistful. "Don't you wish you did?"

"I don't know as I do," replied Inez.

"But don't you see," urged Douglas, "that, without believing it, there's no meaning to anything?"

"Well, what of it?" asked Inez.

"I'm the kind of a guy that has to see a purpose to things, I guess," replied Douglas heavily. "Peter is dead right. Lost Chief is a rotten hole."

"It's a rotten place for women and a paradise for men," stated Judith flatly.

"Never was any place in the world more beautiful," mused Inez. "If you'd just see the beauty all round you, Doug, you'd do without the religion."

"I do see the beauty," replied Douglas. "I've been seeing it ever since you told me to look for it. But it just makes me blue."

"You're no cow-man, Douglas." Inez spoke thoughtfully. "You ought to go East to college and get into politics or something."

Douglas shook his head.

"I'm like Charleton. I couldn't leave these hills and plains for anything the East has to offer me." He rose slowly, and Inez stared up at him. Tall, slender, straight, his young face a little strained, a little wistful, he was, to the older woman, something finer than Lost Chief knew.

"Judith," she said suddenly, "you're an awful fool!"

Judith grunted, immersed in her own troubles.

"Come, old lady," said Douglas; "we must get home."

"I'm going to stay all night with Inez."

"No, you're not, Jude," said Douglas quietly, and he stood waiting.

"Let her stay, Doug. She'll be all right," urged Inez.

"No," replied the young rider, with the familiar straightening of his chin. "Come, Judith."

The tall girl rose, shrugged her shoulders and followed Douglas slowly to the corral.

THE next day, sullenly enough, John ordered Doug to make the horses ready for the round-up. Frost had set in, and he suddenly announced himself as fearful lest snow catch the herds high on the mountains. So Douglas and Judith spent the day bringing in several stout horses from the range. On the morning following, before breakfast was finished, Scott Parson hallooed from the corral. The family went to the door. Scott was leading Sioux and Whoop-la.

"Found these in the old government corral up on Lost Chief Mountain," he said laconically.

"I suppose you're going to get something worth while from dad for this!" cried Judith passionately.

Scott looked at the girl curiously.

"You sure are crazy, Jude! Do you suppose I'd help John Spencer do you like that? John's a blank blank, and he knows it."

Douglas moved over to stand by Ginger's head.

"No man says that to me without a grin." John drew his gun.

"Jude!" said Doug sharply. He reached up and seized Scott's arm and, with a sudden twist, relieved him of his six-shooter.

Judith struck up her father's hand, and a shot scattered dust from the sod roof of the cabin. John smacked Judith on the cheek. She threw herself on him like a fighting she bear. John dropped his gun to seize her wrists, and Mary promptly picked the gun up and gave it to Douglas.

"Now," said Douglas, when Judith stood panting like a young Diana, her eyes black with anger and excitement, "if you two men want to fight, take your fists and go to it!"

John grinned, his eyes on Judith.

"I don't see anybody spoiling for a fist-fight but Judith. You little lynx cat, you get handsomer every day!"

"I'd hate to let a woman make putty of me like that," sneered Scott. "Let me have my shooting-iron, Doug."

Douglas had broken the revolver and unloaded it. He gave it back, receiving the lead-ropes of the two animals in return, and Scott trotted away.

"I'm much obliged to you, Scott!" shrieked Judith. "I'll ride up and tell you all about it some day."

Scott waved his hand but did not look back. John, still holding Judith's wrists, suddenly drew her to him and kissed her full on the lips. Then, with a laugh, he freed her and returned to his breakfast. Douglas swore under his breath and turned the uneasy Sioux and Whoop-la into the corral. The day went forward as if nothing had happened.

That night, Charleton and John appeared at the post-office gathering for the first time since the birth of little Marian's baby. Only Peter had the intrepidity to comment on recent events.

"I didn't want Judith to go alone with you to Mountain City, John," he said. "But all the same, that was a rotten deal you gave her."

"She's a disobedient little hussy"—John's voice was truculent—"and it was the only way I could get at her."

"You mean the fight she put up to help little Marian?" demanded Peter.

"Oh, dry up, Peter!" exclaimed Charleton. "I'm sick of the sound of a woman's name. They're all alike—ungrateful minxes."

" 'Ungrateful' is the word," agreed Peter grimly. "But I'd like to know just what Marian was under obligations to you for."

Charleton did not reply.

"When are they going to be married?" asked Peter, after a moment.

"First of the month. We'll give 'em a party up here in the hall that Lost Chief will never forget. John, do you ride to-morrow?"

"Yes, Charleton. Everybody's reported but you."

"I'll be there. Start from your place as usual?"

John nodded, and the rest of the evening was given over to a discussion of details of the round-up.

THE fall round-up was always a long and arduous affair. The cattle were scattered all through the ranges covered by the Forest Reserve. Slowly and with infinite labor and skill they were sought out and herded down into Hidden Gorge Cañon, below Fire Mesa. Thence they were driven to the plains east of the post-office, where the riders cut out their own cattle.

Perhaps thirty men rode in the Lost Chief crowd. The work was more or less solitary by day, but at night, over the camp-fires, there was society enough. Douglas enjoyed it all to the very tips of his being. He was coming now into the great strength that belonged to his height, and could do his full share of the heavy work. He had thought that, rolled in his blankets under the stars, he would find inspiration that would help him solve the problem of life. But long before the camp-fire was low, he would drop into slumber that ended only when his father shook him at dawn.

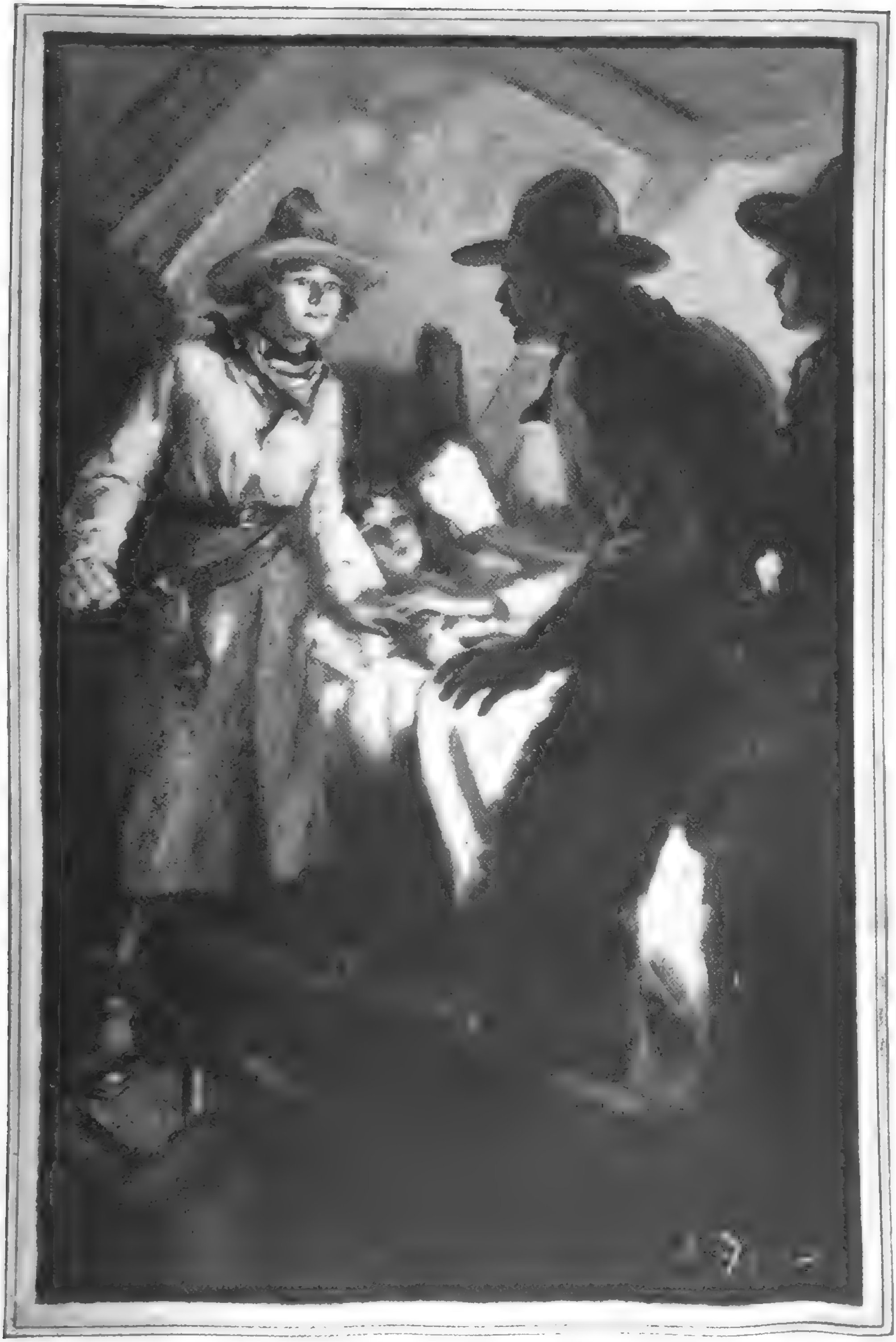
When the round-up reached the plains, the women set up a camp-kitchen and served hot meals. The weather this year held clear to the last day, when a blizzard swept down from Dead Line Peak and the last of the cutting-out was finished in blinding snow. Douglas and John, after putting the last of their yearlings into the home fields, staggered into the warm ranch-kitchen half perished with the cold.

And so another long winter was upon Lost Chief. It was much like other winters for Douglas except for the fact that he began trapping in the cañons and draws round Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks. It was an exceptionally cold season. Game was plentiful, with pelts of unusually fine quality, and Douglas began the accumulation of a sum of money which he planned to use eventually to start his own ranch on the Douglas section, which was to be his when he came of age.

But, although to the young rider the money earned seemed the main aspect of the winter's work, the important result really lay in the deepening it gave to his dawning appreciation of the beauty and mystery of this country so much loved by Inez and hardly less by Judith.

Lost Chief was lovely in the summer with its crystal glory of color on hill and plain. But Lost Chief in winter was awe-inspiring in its naked splendor. Dead Line Peak and Falkner's Peak, barren save for the great blue snows and for the black shadows that crept up and down their tremendous flanks, were separated from each other by a long, narrow, slowly rising valley. Down this valley rushed a tiny brook whose murmur the bitterest weather could not quite still. Along this brook grew quivering aspens, and beside it coyotes kept open a little trail. Along this trail Doug set his traps, as well as up on the wall of the mountains where lynx cats and wolverene were hid.

Each day at noon, mounted on the Moose, with Prince at heel, he rode the circuit of the traps, seldom reaching home until long after supper was cleared away. There were days when, on leaving the ranch for the long, bitter-cold ride, it seemed to Douglas that he never could come back again, that the pain of living in the same house with Judith in her girlish indifference was to be endured no longer. The primitive intimacy in which the family lived made every hour at home a sort of torture to him—a torture that he did not wish to forego, yet that he hardly could endure. One cannot say how much of Douglas's self-control was due to innate refinement, how much to expediency, how much to the male power of inhibition when fighting to win the love of a woman.



Judith, her great eyes blazing, stood with one hand on Marian's shoulder. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, dad? You put a finger on me or Marian if you dare!"

But, whatever the cause, Douglas was developing a power of self-control possessed by no other man in the valley. It made him, even at eighteen, a little grim, a little lonely, a little abstracted. And he rode his traps like a man in a dream, thinking much, but not constantly, of Judith, though she perfumed all his thoughts, but pondering, for the most part, on the blank mystery of life and on the enigma of love which, to him, seemed far more productive of pain than of joy. Little by little he found himself eager to get into the hills. Quite consciously he left the ranch each day with the thought that, when he reached them, he would find a wordless peace.

And thus the winter slipped away and bluebirds dipped again in the spring beyond the corral. And again alfalfa perfumed the alkaline dust that followed the herds into the reserve, and then again frost laid waste the struggling gardens of the high altitude, and for another winter Doug followed traps, varying the monotony by getting out pine logs for his ranch-house.

THE winter that Judith was twenty and Douglas twenty-two was one of the most severe ever known in the Lost Chief country. It was preceded by a summer of drought, and the alfalfa and wild-hay fields failed. Feed could not be bought. Steers and horses died by the score. Doug did little trapping, for he and his father spent the bitter storm-swept days fighting to save their stock. By March they were cutting young aspens and hauling it to the famished herds to nibble. Coyotes moved brazenly by day across the home fields, stealing refuse from the very dooryards. Eagles perched on fence-posts near the chicken-runs. Jack-rabbits in herds of many score milled about the wind-swept barrens, gnawing the grass already cattle-cropped to the roots. The cold and snow persisted till mid-April, and even then Lost Chief was only beginning to thaw on its lower, northern edge.

Charleton Falkner, who had been especially hard hit by the famine and the cold, asked Doug late in April to go out with him after wild horses. They left Charleton's ranch early one morning, driving a sheep wagon stocked with a week's feed and trailing four saddle-horses. On the tail-board were several carefully hoarded bags of oats and a bale of alfalfa.

All day long they pushed north over the hills, each hill and valley lower than the last. When they made their night camp, the snows were gone. The next day, too, they followed ever-dropping trails that disappeared toward noon, leaving Charleton to find his way through barren hills that were crisscrossed only by antelope and coyote tracks. At mid-afternoon, from the crest of one of these hills, they beheld a winding black river with a flush of green along it borders. They covered the miles to this at a trot and made their camp beside the rushing waters. The eager horses almost rended harness and halter in their desire to taste the budding grass round the sage-brush roots.

They carried food and fodder only for a week, so they dared allow but two days for the hunting. At dawn they had finished breakfast and were riding up into the rolling hills to the west. Brown crests against a pale-blue morning sky, then a sudden flood of crimson against a high horizon-line. Against this crimson a sudden row of grazing horses.

"We'll separate now," said Charleton. "Do like we always do. Pick out one horse and ride him down. They will be awful soft after such a winter. Don't get side-tracked from one horse to another. They'd kill the Moose off at that. He's getting pretty old for this kind of thing. I'll see you at camp to-night."

Douglas dropped into a valley which twisted under the hill where the wild horses were grazing. Then he dismounted and, leading his horse, began to make his way upward through the sage-brush which covered the hillside. When he was within a hundred yards of the herd, he paused. There were fifteen horses of every kind and color. Douglas selected a jet-black mare with a wonderful tail and mane and turned to mount. Charleton, at this moment, appeared on the far side of the hill. The Moose nickered, and the herd tossed heads and broke.

The mare dropped over the east side of the hill as if she had been shot. Douglas turned the Moose after her, and they hurtled down the steep slope with thundering hoofs. For some moments the Moose sought to turn hither and yon as different horses flashed across his vision. But Doug held him to the black mare, and once the Moose realized that the black mare alone was their quarry, Douglas was able to give almost all his attention to watching the mare.

She did not show fight nor did she double on her tracks. Fleet as a bird, she flew over the hills, dropping into cañons, leaping draws, jumping rock heaps. Little by little she drew ahead of the Moose until she became no larger than a black coyote against the yellow hills. But Douglas would not allow the Moose to break from his swift trot. As long as he could keep the mare in sight, he was content.

The sun was sailing high and the Moose was winded when the mare, cantering painfully along the ridge of a hill, stumbled and fell. She was up again at once, but her gait slowed perceptibly. In less than a half-hour, Doug was within roping-distance of her. As the lariat sang above her head, she half turned, gave Doug a look of anguished surprise, leaped sideways and disappeared up a crevice in the cañon wall. Douglas spurred the Moose in after her. He found himself in a little valley, thick grown with dwarf willow. The mare was not to be seen.

Now began a search that persisted till the Moose's sturdy legs were trembling. Douglas threaded the valley again and again. There was no exit save through the one crevice by which they had entered. He had all but concluded that the mare had been swallowed up by the earth when he found her huddled behind some cedars which grew on a ledge six feet above the valley floor. With a laugh, he again twirled his rope, and it slipped over the tossing black head. As the Moose turned and the rope tightened, the mare gave a scream that was like that of a human being in dire agony. For a moment she dragged back, then, head drooping, trembling in every muscle, she jumped from the ledge and followed in.

Dusk was falling when Douglas made the camp, and Charleton already had started a fire in the little cook-stove. He came out and examined the mare.

"She's a beauty, Doug. Don't believe she's over four years old. Any brand on her?"

"No. From the looks of her hoofs, I'd say she's been born with the herd. What luck did you have, Charleton?"

"None at all. I took after a young stallion, and he wore my horse out. I know where he's bedding down to-night, and I'll get him to-morrow or shoot him."

"You'll get him," said Douglas.

They were off at dawn. Douglas rode this day a young bay horse he had recently broken and named Pard. But though Pard was strong and willing, he lacked the skill of the Moose in running in this rough country, and by noon Douglas was obliged to give up the pursuit of a dapple-gray he had selected. He was far out on the plains when he made the decision to turn campward. To the distant south, in the Lost Chief ranges, a snow-storm was raging, but Pard and Douglas were dripping with sweat under a sweltering sun. Strange, thimble-shaped green hills dotted the plains about them. Douglas drew up at the base of one of these to rest his horse. Hardly had he done so when a tiny herd of antelope trotted casually round a neighboring hillock. They halted, sniffed and turned, but not before Douglas had drawn his saddle-gun and fired at the leader. The creature went lame at once, but disappeared with his fellows among the green hills.

Douglas followed and shortly found a spot of blood that was repeated at irregular intervals for a mile or so. Pard was grunting now, but Douglas roweled him and pushed on until he saw the antelope kneeling in the lee of a rock outcropping. It struggled to its feet and fell again, its beautiful head drooping against its crimsoned breast.

"Wonder if I can get you home alive to Judith," said Douglas.

He roped the antelope round the horns and dragged it from its futile sanctuary, then dismounted and removed the lariat. The antelope bleated but lay trembling, making no attempt to rise. Douglas examined the shattered shoulder.

"You poor devil!" he said. "Even if you weren't hurt so badly, you'd die of fright before I could get you home. Well, of course, I'm sorry venison is out of season, but a man must eat." He put his gun to the delicate head, and an hour later Pard was snorting under a gunny-sack of venison. Douglas lighted a cigarette and, whistling gaily, started once more for camp.

BUT this, if not a day of what Lost Chief would call real adventure, was at least to be a day of episode. About mid-afternoon Doug heard the tinkle of a sheep-bell.

He was not surprised, for he knew that he was well within sheep country. Douglas followed the tinkle and came shortly to a wide draw where moved a mighty gray mass of sheep. The herder, on a bay horse, responded to Doug's halloo with a wave of his hand. Douglas made his way round the edge of the draw and waited for the herder, who rode slowly up to meet him. Then he stared at the stranger's gray-bearded face with the utmost surprise.

"Mr. Fowler!" he cried. "What are you doing out here?"

The older man, in shabby blue overalls and jumper, a black slouch hat pulled over his eyes, smiled grimly.

"You have the advantage of me, young man. I don't remember your face."

"I'm glad you don't," replied Douglas. "But I've always wanted to tell you I sure Gawd was ashamed of myself. I was the kid that made you trouble at Lost Chief seven or eight years ago."

Fowler studied the young rider's frank face.

"So you are!" he said slowly. "So you are! Well, I'll never have that kind of trouble again. Have you eaten? I'm late about dinner. Fact is, I get careless about my meals living alone."

"No; I've been out after wild horses, and don't plan to eat till I get back to camp ten miles yonder on the creek."

"Better break bread with me," suggested the preacher.

"That's sure white of you! I don't mind if I do." Douglas returned Mr. Fowler's grim look with one of wistful curiosity.

THE preacher silently led the way to the sheep-herder's wagon which perched on the peak of a hill above the draw.

"I don't have much to offer you but beans," he said as they dismounted.

Douglas looked from the blood-stained gunny-sack to the clergyman's deep-set eyes, hesitated, then said,

"Beans are good and the sheep-man's staple." He followed into the wagon and sat on the edge of the bunk while Fowler prepared the frugal meal.

"Do you mind telling me," asked Doug, "why you are herding sheep instead of folks?"

"I couldn't earn a decent living herding folks. My wife died. I took anything that offered that would take me away from men and their accursed ways. There was something about sheep-herding that made me think of Jesus Christ and the country round about Bethlehem. I have found a kind of peace here."

Douglas cleared his throat.

"How long have you been at it?"

"A couple of years."

"How was it you couldn't earn a living preaching?"

"It's an age of unfaith," replied the preacher.

"I don't believe it's an age of unfaith." Douglas puffed slowly on a cigarette. "That is, not like you mean. That Sunday, if you'd given us something we could have set our teeth in, we'd have listened to you. I remember distinctly I sat down in the back of the room, saying to myself, 'Now, if this old-timer has something interesting to say, I won't let the kids in.' But you—excuse me, Mr. Fowler—you just got up and bleated like a Montana sheep-man."

The preacher set the coffee-pot on the stove, straightened himself and shouted,

"I spoke the word of God!"

"I don't know whether there's a God or not. Probably there isn't any. But if there is, I'll bet He never talks foolish threats that a fellow has hard work to understand." Mr. Fowler gasped. "Now, wait a moment," protested Douglas. "Don't get mad and throw me out like I did you. I'm a man now, and I tell you, Mr. Fowler, I'm troubled about many things and I want you to let me talk to you."

The beautiful, sympathetic light of the shepherd of souls shone in the clergyman's eyes.

"Talk on, my boy. I, too, am troubled about many things. But not about God. I know Him!"

"How do you know Him?"

"By His works—the sun, the stars, the universe, through His holy word, the Bible."

Douglas waved his hands irritably.

"Words! Just words! How can they mean anything to a hard-headed man like me? Everything came out of a fire-mist. How do you know it was a mind made that fire-mist? Why couldn't it have been a—a—Christ, what could it have been?" Douglas paused with white lips agape with horror.

Fowler motioned the young rider to a seat at the table.

"God bless our food and give us understanding," he said. Then he served Doug and sat staring thoughtfully at his own coffee-cup. "Were you ever in love?" he finally asked.

"Yes."

"Did she love you?"

"Not that I can find out."

"Does she know that you love her?"

"Yes; I told her so."

"But," said Mr. Fowler, "love isn't something you can put your teeth in. How can she believe you?"

"Because I'm something she can put her teeth in. Believe me, Mr. Fowler, if God once convinced me He was real, I'd believe anything He told me. Just give me facts. That's all I want."

"The universe is a fact."

"Yes; but the universe being a fact doesn't prove there's any hereafter. Hang it, Mr. Fowler, can't you preachers get it through your heads that what people want you to prove to them is that there is a hereafter? That's all there is to your job. Prove that, and you can lead us round by the nose. But if you can't show us that the soul doesn't die, there is no meaning in anything, and we might as well be like we are in Lost Chief."

"What's the matter with Lost Chief?" Mr. Fowler's smile was grim.

"Peter Knight says it's we have no ethics. Inez Rodman says it's we don't know beauty when we see it."

"Inez Rodman? Oh, that woman of the yellow cañon! If there were a minister in Lost Chief, she wouldn't be in the valley."

"Oh, I don't know. Religion doesn't seem to affect her kind anywhere. But Peter says we'd ought to have built a church along with the schoolhouse. I don't see myself how the kind of Bible stuff you teach would help a hard-living, hard-thinking kind of people like us."

"Did you ever read the Bible, Douglas?" asked the preacher.

"I've tried to. If you ask me to read it like it was only more or less true history, I could get away with it. But when you tell me it's actual words of God and show me a picture of God in long white whiskers and a white robe, why, you can't get away with it—that's all. I know that nothing like that ever produced Fire Mesa or Lost Chief range or—or Judith."

Mr. Fowler groaned.

"Douglas, you are blasphemous!"

"I'm not. I'm just unhappy. I think I was meant to be a religious guy. I'm of New England stock, and they all depended a lot on religion. But I just can't swallow it."

"And you never will as long as you take the point of view you do. You must wipe your mind clear of all you have read and thought, for God says that unless we become as little children, we cannot believe. Religion is not a matter of knowledge and reason. Religion is a matter of hope and faith."

DOUGLAS sat turning this over in his mind, his yellow hair rumpled, his clear eyes, with the sun-wrinkles in the corners, fixed on the far, snowy gleam of Lost Chief range.

"Hope and faith," he repeated softly.

There was a shout from without:

"Oh, you Doug!" And Charleton rode up at a gallop. He stopped before the open door.

"I've been trailing you for two hours. I got three horses penned up in a draw and I need your help. Hello, Fowler! What the devil are you doing out here?"

"Come in and have a bite of grub, Falkner," said the preacher.

"Don't care if I do." Charleton threw a weary leg across the saddle and dismounted. Douglas, who had finished his meal, returned to the bunk and Charleton took his place.

"Kind of funny to find you and Doug eating together," said Charleton.

"He should have given me a swift kick," agreed Douglas. "Instead, he fed me."

"That's sound religion, isn't it?" asked Mr. Fowler, pouring Charleton a cup of coffee.

"It's sound hospitality, anyhow," replied Charleton.

"Aw, any one would admit Fowler lives up to his faith," expostulated Douglas.

Charleton glanced at the young rider in surprise.

"What's happened to you, old trapper?"

"Nothing. Only, I wish I had the same religion he's got."

"So's you would herd sheep?" asked Charleton.

"So's I could have peace," retorted Douglas.

"Peace? What does a kid like you want

of peace? Anybody that can't find peace in Lost Chief is a fool."

"I'm no fool," contradicted Doug, with a growing irritation at Charleton for interrupting his talk with Fowler. "And where is there a peaceful person in Lost Chief?"

"Douglas," said Charleton, "when you are as old as I am, you'll realize that Lost Chief is as near heaven as man can hope to get. A poke of salt and a gun on your saddle, a blanket tied behind, a good horse under you, the Persian poet in your pocket all the time and the ranges before you—and what more could mortal man desire?"

"A woman, you've always said before," grunted Douglas.

"I was holding back out of respect to the sky-pilot," laughed Charleton. "But, since you mention it, there's Inez, who's always ready for a trip."

Mr. Fowler shot a quick look at Douglas.

"Are you and Douglas partners, Falkner?" he asked.

"Once in a while. Why are you herding sheep, Fowler? This herd yours?"

"No; they belong to a Denver man. I'm herding because I couldn't keep a church together."

Charleton nodded.

"The day of the church is over."

THERE was silence, during which Charleton devoured beans, Douglas smoked, and the preacher sat with his eyes on the slow-moving herd. Finally, Charleton said,

"And why do you think something is the matter with Lost Chief, Douglas?"

"In other parts of the country," replied Douglas, his blue eyes fixed unwaveringly on Charleton's dark face, "among people of our kind and breed, a girl like Judith couldn't run with a girl like Inez and be considered decent. And a couple like Jimmy and little Marian couldn't have a party a week after they were married, the baby attending, and be considered O. K. by the so-called best folks and nothing more said."

Charleton's face grew darkly red.

"Who told you that?" he asked in an ugly voice.

"I'm not a fool, as I've told you before. And, as you very well know, I've wanted Judith for my wife ever since I was a boy, and I haven't wanted her manhandled. And you know, as Jude said once, a girl has about as much chance of staying straight in Lost Chief as a cottontail has with a coyote pack. She's good because, well, because she's Judith—that's all. Now, I tell you when things are as hard as that for a young girl in a beautiful place like our valley, there's something wrong. And look at little Marian."

"Leave her out or you'll regret it," snarled Charleton.

"I'm not afraid of you, Charleton," said Douglas, with indifference not at all assumed. "Little Marian is a peach of a girl. But she's had a wrong start."

"She's got a fine baby and a good husband."

"I never could argue with you, Charleton. But I know Lost Chief is a bad place for girls. Why, I'll bet there isn't a finer bunch of girls than ours in the world for looks and nerve and smartness. Peter says he's never seen any that could touch them. And take the stories you read! Where's a heroine like Judith?"

There was something so simple and so earnest in Doug's manner and voice that the red died out of Charleton's face and he said,

"I'm with you on that point, Douglas."

"How old are you, Douglas?" asked Mr. Fowler.

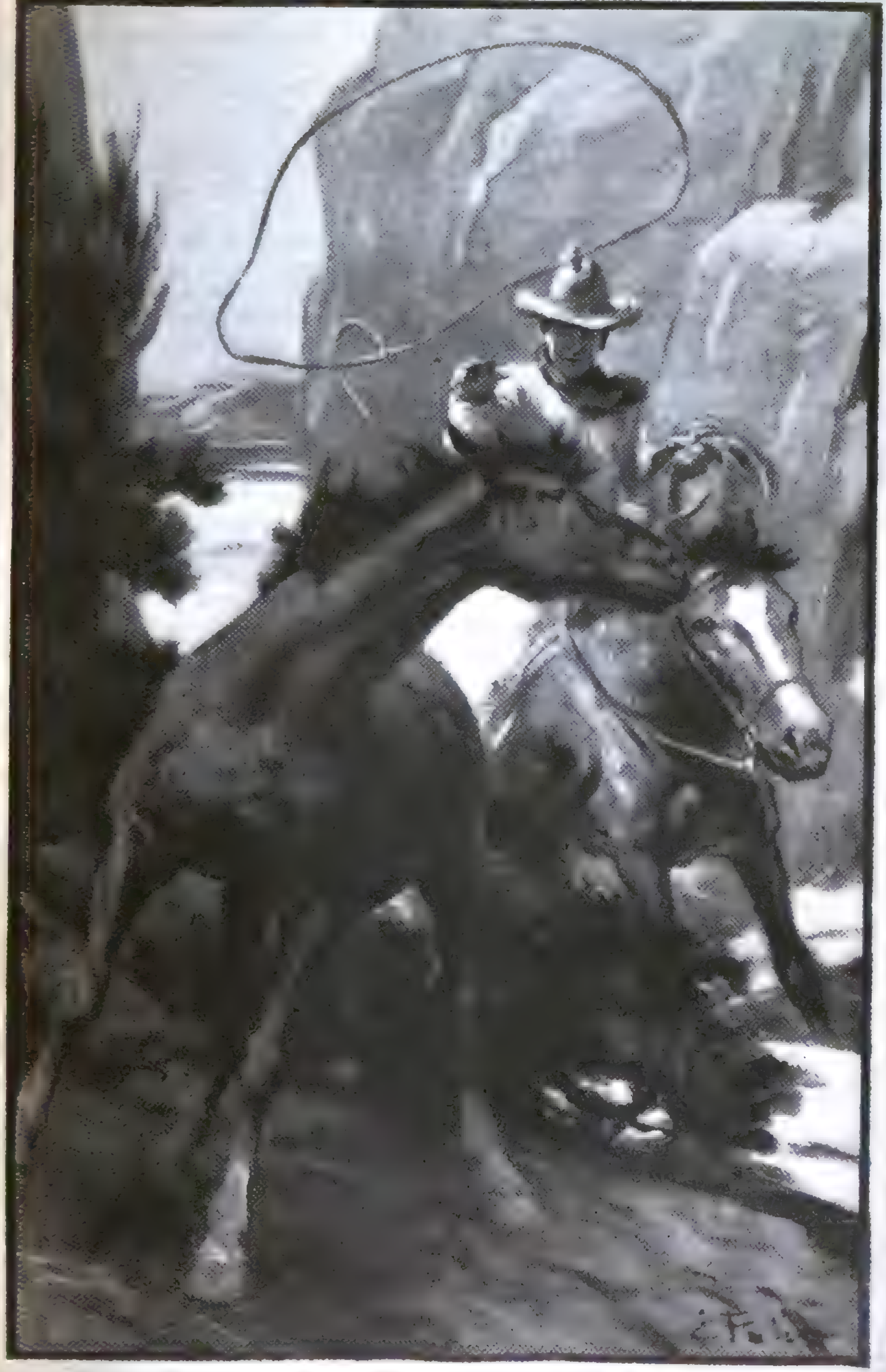
"Twenty-three. I just want to say this one thing more and then I'm through. When things like that happen to Jimmy and little Marian, they aren't doing the right thing by Lost Chief, and"—rising with sudden, restless fire—"I'd like to see Lost Chief be the kind of a place my grandfather Douglas wanted it to be."

Charleton yawned.

"We'd better be moving along."

"Don't go for a minute," pleaded Mr. Fowler. "Douglas was right when he said that the whole world is hungry for a belief in immortality. And so long as the world exists, it will have that hunger. And religion is God's answer to that hunger. Civilization without religion is the body without a soul. Religion brings a spiritual peace that man perpetually craves and that riches or women or horses or the hunt never brought and never can bring. At heart there's not an unhappier man than you, Falkner. Why? Because you have no belief in immortality."

"Great God, Fowler, how can I believe in it when I can't?" shouted Charleton.



As the lariat sang above the mare's head, she half turned, gave Doug a look of anguished surprise, leaped sideways and disappeared up a crevice in the cañon wall.

"Exactly! How can you?" returned Fowler deliberately. "No foul-minded man ever yet had an ear for the word of the living God."

Charleton jumped to his feet.

"What do you mean, you bastard cleric, you!"

"Aw, come off, Charleton!" exclaimed Douglas. "I've learned more dirt from you than I bet Judith ever has from Inez. Come on; let's go get the horses. Thanks for the grub, Mr. Fowler."

"You are very welcome. Don't go away angry with me, Falkner. If I called you foul-minded, you called me by a foul name."

"I guess we're even," agreed Charleton. "I'm obliged to you for the meal." He swung out of the wagon, mounted his horse and was off, Douglas following.

CHARLETON had hobbled his capture of horses in a little draw several miles from the sheep-camp. In the excitement and hard work of herding the wild creatures into the camp and rehobbling them, there was no opportunity to discuss the visit with the preacher sheep-herder. Nor did Douglas wish to bring the matter up when, long after dark, they sat down to their supper of venison and biscuits. He kept Charleton firmly to the story of his capture of each horse, and when this was done and the dishes washed, he went to bed.

But long after Charleton had crawled in beside him, Doug lay awake thinking of Judith and of the preacher. He wondered what influence a man like Fowler would have on a girl like Judith.

"I wish Grandfather Douglas had put the church up with the schoolhouse," he said to himself. "Maybe it would have saved Judith as well as Scott Parson." Then he gasped. An idea of overwhelming importance had come to him. He lay for an instant contemplating it; then he crept from the bunk and the sheep wagon into the open. It was a frosty, starlit night. The river rushed like black oil, silver cakes of ice grinding above the roar of the current. The Moose was munching on a wisp of alfalfa. Douglas saddled him and led him softly out of hearing of the wagon, then sprang upon his back and put him to the canter.

Two hours later, Douglas was banging on the door-frame of Fowler's sheep wagon.

"It's just me, Douglas Spencer," he replied to the preacher's startled query. "I had to come over to ask you something."

A light flashed through the canvas; then the door opened.

"Come in! Come in! Light the fire while I pull my boots on. This is like the days when I was saving souls and marrying couples."

Douglas quickly had a fire blazing and pulled the coffee-pot forward. He pushed his hat back on his head and the candle-light threw into sharp relief the firm set of his lips. His six-shooter banged on the bench as he sat down and put one spurred boot on the hearth. The preacher perched, blinking, on the edge of the bunk. Through the canvas came the endless restless movement of many sheep.

"Mr. Fowler," said Douglas, "I own some land that came to me from my mother when I was twenty-one. If I build you a little church on it, will you come to Lost Chief and live there and preach? I'll be responsible for your wages."

Fowler's face was inscrutable.

"Why do you want me to come, Douglas?"

For the first time Doug's voice thickened.

"I want you to help Lost Chief and to save Judith."

"Tell me about Judith."

Douglas hesitated; then he asked:

"Catholics have a thing they call the confessional, haven't they? Well, it's a good idea, if the chap they confess to is the right kind. I don't believe a word of your religion, and yet I have a feeling that you are the right kind. Judith—she's twenty-one now. I'm six feet one. She's about two inches shorter. Weighs, I guess, fifty pounds lighter. Finest gray eyes you ever saw. Red cheeks. Her mouth used to be too large, but now it's perfect. Rides and breaks a horse better than any man in the valley, bar none. Loves animals and can tame anything. A great reader—" Douglas paused.

"She sounds very attractive. What's the trouble?" asked the preacher.

Douglas twisted his hands together.

"You know Inez. She's Jude's best friend, and she's formed all Jude's ideas on love and marriage."

"Yet you say Judith is fine and straight?"

"Yes. Do you—do you recall my father, Mr. Fowler?"

"I met him a good many years ago. A

handsome daredevil, a good deal like Judith, I should say."

"He's not Judith's father. He married Jude's mother when Jude was a baby and my mother had been dead several years. He used to be awful rough with Judith—licked her and made her do heavy chores. But he quit that when she got older and grew pretty, and now he——"

Douglas hesitated. The preacher nodded.

"Does Judith like him?"

"In a way. He's handsome, and has a very winning way with women. He boasts that no woman ever held out against him, and Grandma Brown says that is true. Every once in a while he loses his temper and does something that makes Jude hate him. Then he's so darned fascinating to make up for it that she forgives him."

"How about Judith's mother?"

"Oh, she's just broken like a patient fool horse. Good as gold, you know, but with about as much influence over Jude as a kitten. Judith hasn't any one to tie to—not any one. Peter is all right, but he jaws too much. She hasn't any one."

"Doesn't she care for you?"

"She says she's fond of me. Fond of me! I'd rather she hated me. I'd as soon have a dish of cold mush from a woman like Jude as fondness."

"And do you think I could influence Judith?"

"I don't know. But I want you to try. And it isn't all Judith with me. I love Lost Chief. I never want to live anywhere else. And I'd like to see it the kind of a place my grandfather Douglas wanted it to be. No; it honestly isn't all for Judith, though she's the beginning and the end of it."

There was something almost affectionate in the preacher's deep-set eyes as he watched Douglas.

"Do you realize, my boy, what you are asking? When you bring a preacher into Lost Chief, you are going to rouse an antagonism against yourself that will astound you. These people are of New England stock. There is no more intelligent stock in America, no stock that is more conceited, more narrow, more obstinate or more ruthless. And the further a New Englander gets from religion the more brutal his virtues become. If you take me into Lost Chief, you are going to start a depth of strife of which we cannot foresee the end."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Douglas. He rested his chin on his palm and eyed the glowing stove thoughtfully. "I guess you are right"—finally—"nothing makes Lost Chief folks so mad as to have some one hint they aren't perfect." Then he chuckled. "It'll be a real man's fight. I wonder what Jude will say. Are you afraid, Mr. Fowler?"

"Afraid? Yes. I'm not as young as I was once, and I am not overanxious for such a struggle. But this thing isn't in my hands. If ever the Almighty showed Himself a directing force, He is showing it here. This is what He ordained from the day you drove me out of the schoolhouse. Do you remember what I said to you?"

"You quoted the Bible, I think. I don't remember what it was."

"I said, 'Ye shall find no place to repent you, though ye seek for it with tears.' "

Douglas murmured the words over to himself. His face worked a little.

"It's true! It's the living truth!" he exclaimed unevenly. "Not that I've got anything to repent—" He hesitated. "What is repentance? What is life? Where is God—if there is a God? What does it all mean, anyhow?"

The preacher said slowly:

" 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.' That's what it all means. When shall you be ready for me, Douglas?"

"I think the fall would be best. Suppose we say right after the round-up? I'll look for you on the twentieth of September."

"That will suit me. I can then give my boss ample notice."

"What pay will you want, Mr. Fowler?"

"Just enough to feed and clothe me. We'll arrange that after we get a church established."

Douglas rose with a broad grin.

"I sure Gawd have let myself in for something now," he said. "But I'll take care of you, Mr. Fowler."

"All right, young Moses!" returned the preacher, smiling into Doug's eager face. "Good-night."

Charleton was still sound asleep when Douglas, at dawn, lay down beside him.

BY TEN o'clock that morning they had broken camp and had started homeward, with their kicking, squealing herd of wild horses. The little black mare alone was led with docility. The trip back was uneventful—that is, from the point of view of a cow-man, and they reached the pass late in the afternoon of the second day and Douglas was at home with his trembling mare in time for supper. The family greeted his report of the result of the week's effort with considerable hilarity. But Douglas was not perturbed.

"I had more interest in meeting Mr. Fowler," he said, as he buttered a biscuit, "than I did in the hunting."

"The old preacher! Where was he?" exclaimed John.

"He's starved out at preaching and is herding sheep down in the Green Thimble country. He fed Charleton and me, and we had a long talk."

"You had nerve to eat with him after the way we treated him," laughed Judith.

"I felt that way myself. But he hadn't held a grudge against me. Fact is, I think he's so lonely he was glad to see me."

"Who is he herding for?" asked Mary.

"Some one in Denver. He's going to give it up in the fall."

"What for? Got a church?" grinned John.

Douglas nodded slowly.

"Yes."

"Where?" asked Mary.

"In Lost Chief."

"Lost Chief!" roared John. "What are you giving us?"

"I'm giving it to you straight. I asked him if he would come if I built him a little church up on my part of the ranch, and he said he would."

There was a stunned silence while the audience of three considered this reply. Then Judith said:

"I bite. What's the joke, Doug?"

"No joke. I asked him to come. I want to hear what he has to say."

John scratched his head.

"You mean you actually asked that old fool to come and preach in Lost Chief?"

Douglas nodded over a piece of pie.

"In a church you'd build?" asked John.

Again Douglas nodded.

"Are you plumb loco?" John's voice began to rise.

Douglas's color was rising.

"Maybe I am. It can't hurt any one to have him here, can it?"

"I guess he won't stay long enough to do any actual harm." Judith laughed.

"He's going to stay quite a spell," returned Douglas. "I'm going to look out for him."

"But everybody will just make fun of him and of you, too," volunteered Mary.

"Probably," agreed Douglas. "But at that they won't have as much fun as I'll have."

"Look here, Doug," urged his father; "just what is the joke?"

"Now, listen, dad! It's not a joke. I'm in dead earnest. I haven't got a particle of religion in me, but I'm interested in that line of talk to see if I can discover what other folks find in it. Peter Knight's no fool. He knows the world. He says Lost Chief needs a church. All right; it's going to have one."

"You'll be the laughing-stock of the valley," said John roughly.

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't."

"Well, he can't come to this house!" roared John. "I wouldn't have one of that breed on the place!"

"I knew that." Douglas's jaw was set. "That's why I plan to build him a cabin up on my section."

He did not look at Judith. Had he done so, he would have surprised on her face an expression of wistful admiration.

"I sure wonder, Doug," said John irritably, "where you get your crazy notions."

"He's exactly like his grandfather Douglas," exclaimed Mary.

"His grandfather Douglas!" cried John. "Why, the old man would kick the stones off his grave if he knew what his grandson was up to. He used to boast that he came West just to get rid of the Presbyterians and the allopaths. Nothing he hated like a sky-pilot."

Douglas shrugged his shoulders as he rose.

"I hope you'll like that black mare, Jude," he said, "when you look her over in the morning. She's yours."

"You are kind to the women, even if you are going loco, Doug," laughed Judith.

"Right-o! And now I'm going to bed," he said, unbuckling his spurs.

THE next morning at breakfast, John was irritable and would not let the subject of Fowler's coming rest.

"What did Charleton say?" he asked.

"Charleton doesn't know," replied Douglas patiently. "He wasn't there when I talked it over with the preacher."

"I'll bet he wasn't, or you never would have gotten away with it," growled John.

"Sure! I'm a nervous man about Charleton," grinned Douglas. "Come now, dad; why should you be so sore at the idea?"

"Lots of reasons. I hate a man who thinks he's enough superior to me to tell me how to behave. And I feel sore as a pup that my son should be bringing such a man into the valley. All the folks will say you are criticizing them. I'm not going to let you do it, Douglas."

Douglas gave a short laugh, which was echoed by Judith. John grew red.

"My father would have thrashed me when I was a grown man if I'd laughed at him like that."

"Oh, well, look at the man he was!" chuckled Judith.

"Don't you speak that way to me." roared John. "The children of this generation certainly are a bad lot. But one thing you two will remember: I'm master of this house, and as long as you stay here you'll obey me. And you just let me hear you telling anybody, Doug, of your crazy plan, and you'll learn for the first time what I am!"

"Then you won't help me put up my buildings?" asked Douglas.

"Not for the use of any damned preacher!" shouted his father.

Douglas lighted a cigarette and went out. There still was too much frost in the ground for spring work on the ranch, and it would be a month before the cattle could be driven up into the reserve. It was during this month that Douglas had planned to put up the cabins on his ranch, one for the church, the other for himself and Mr. Fowler to occupy. He had accumulated enough logs to more than supply his needs and he had counted on his father's help. He wondered now if he could turn to Peter, and that afternoon he rode down to the post-office.

Peter was deeply interested in Douglas's plans and promised not only his help in building the cabins but to keep the secret of Fowler's coming. The quick antagonism shown by John had made Douglas realize that Mr. Fowler's warning as to Lost Chief's reaction was well founded. And Doug had no desire to give the valley time to formulate its resentment into a campaign four months before the preacher's arrival. So he pledged Peter to secrecy. The next day they began work on the cabins.

Lost Chief Creek bordered one edge of Douglas's acres. Dead Line Peak pushed an abrupt shoulder into the stream on the northwest corner. Below this shoulder lay a grove of silvery lavender aspens and of blue spruce, dripping with a great bronze cones. Just beyond the flood-line of the creek Douglas trimmed enough trees from the grove to give elbow-room for his cabins and corrals. All during the budding spring and the burning summer Douglas and Peter spent their spare hours in the building operations. The walls of the two cabins were chinked within and daubed without with adobe. The roofs were sodded. On the larger cabin, which Peter had designated the "log chapel," Douglas was inclined to lavish considerable pains. He drove into Mountain City and brought out a load of matched lumber with which to make pews, and he made a raised platform for the pulpit.

PETER was glad of the opportunity the work gave him to learn more of Doug's mind. They were making their nooning in the sun at the edge of the grove one day. Lost Chief Valley sloped below them. A blue line of smoke rose from the Spencers' ranch-house.

"Dad's sure sore at me this time!" volunteered Douglas.

"About Fowler, I suppose," said Peter.

"Yes. He's afraid I'm going to get religious. I can't make him believe that that is not why I'm bringing Fowler in."

"What other reason have you?" asked the postmaster, taking a huge bite of cold fried beef.

"I don't want to get religious. I want to get to believe in a future life."

Peter laughed.

"Is there a difference?"

"Yes, there is. You can believe in immortality without believing in miracles and that Eve was made out of a man's rib."

Peter made no comment for a moment. He finished his beef and lighted his pipe before he said:

"I have an idea that the kind of mind that can believe in the soul's floating round in space can swallow the rib story without much choking. What I want to see in Lost Chief is the kind of ethics that Christ taught."

"Ethics! Ethics!" scoffed the younger man. "Who gives a hang about ethics if they aren't going to help us live again? You can bet I don't! Ethics may do for a cold-blooded guy like you, Peter. But me—I want something as big and as real and as warm-looking as Fire Mesa."

"Poor old Fowler!" groaned Peter.

Douglas glanced at the postmaster questioningly; then his eyes wandered back toward the ranch-house. A tiny figure in blue leaped on a horse and was off at a gallop.

"Judith going to Inez's place," said Douglas.

"She sees too much of Inez." Peter scowled. "Her mind is getting exactly Inez's twist to it."

"There was a time when you told me Inez could give Judith good advice." Doug's voice was bitter.

"So she could. But I never said Inez and Jude should be buddies, did I?"

Douglas threw his cigarette into the creek and rolled over on his face with a groan.

"I'm sick of worrying about it," he said.

"Does she still talk about going the round of the rodeos with a string of buckers?"

"No. She says that was just kid stuff. She has an idea now she'll breed thoroughbred horses." Douglas turned over on his back and gazed up into the heavens, where an eagle hung motionless.

"Lord! Breeding horses is no work for Jude!" cried Peter.

Douglas did not reply. Peter eyed the young man's clean, hawklike profile and went on,

"What does she say about you and Fowler?"

"She laughs at me."

"Do you think you can get her in touch with Fowler?"

Douglas sat up with a jerk.

"Get her in touch with him? Say—what do you think I'm bringing that sky-pilot in here for? You can bet she'll get in touch with him! I'll show that girl I haven't played all my cards yet."

Peter stared long at Douglas.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered and filled his pipe again.

The summer passed for Douglas with extraordinary rapidity. Profiting by the experience of the previous winter, every rancher put in as heavy a grain crop as he could handle, and there was little leisure in the valley during July and August.

THERE was much joking and derisive laughter over Mr. Fowler's coming to Lost Chief when, at last, the secret did creep out, but beneath this was a sense of resentment that grew day by day. Grandma Brown, Peter, of course, and Frank Day were sympathetic to the idea. Some of the older women wondered if it might not be a good thing in giving the young fry a place to go on Sundays. But the young fry, with huge enjoyment not untinged with malice, planned to run the preacher out of the valley in short order and to mete out such treatment to Douglas as would prevent his making a like fool of himself again.

Douglas had set up housekeeping in the new cabin now, and on the night before he expected Mr. Fowler, Judith rode up to see his new home. He had finished his supper and sat on the door-step for a half-hour before her arrival, watching her approach. She jumped from Buster and dropped to the door-step beside him.

"Scott's heard of a standard-bred mare he can get for me for five hundred dollars," she said.

"Have you got the money?"

"Only half of it. Everything I could sell in the last five years only amounts to two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I'll lend it to you," offered Douglas.

"Dad said he'd let me have it and so did Inez, but I'd rather borrow from you."

Douglas flushed with pleasure.

"Why had you, Judith?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, dad's too eager to get a hold on me. And Inez—I'd rather not go outside the family for money. And you—well, I'd trust you with my soul or any other old thing I possess."

"I hadn't any idea you felt that way, Judith."

"Oh, I'm not such a wild woman that I don't know a real man when I see one, Douglas, even if you are making a fool of yourself just now."

"Fool!" exclaimed Doug. "Now *you* are talking like a fool, Judith. And if the neighbors think Fowler and I are the only ones that are going to be in trouble over this thing, they will learn different."

"I just wish you weren't trying to do it," repeated Judith.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Douglas.

"Why, be a first-class rancher, make money, and travel, and learn something about life."

"That's what I plan to do. But I want to do more than that. I want to fix Lost Chief so that a couple of kids like you and me don't have to learn all they know about real things from a woman like Inez and a man like Charleton. And if a sky-pilot can answer those questions right, why, I'm going to have one in here if I have to mount guard on him day and night. My kids are going to grow up right here in Lost Chief, and they aren't going round like little wild horses when it comes to asking questions about love and death. No ma'am!"

"Aw, what does old Fowler know about such things?" cried Judith.

"That's what I aim to find out," replied Doug.

Twilight was upon the valley, though Falkner's Peak still glowed crimson in outline, and the Forest Reserve to the east was silver-blue, shot with lines of flame. The evening star trembled above Fire Mesa. Up on Dead Line Peak behind them a pack of coyotes barked.

"We miss you down at the house," said Judith suddenly.

"I miss you up here. Oh, Judith, marry me! Let's make a fine home up here together. I love you, Judith! You are my whole life to me."

Judith's voice rose passionately.

"Don't talk about it! Don't! How can I settle down to being a drudge all my life? I don't believe in marriage, I tell you. I don't."

"Why not?"

"I've told you again and again. I don't want to cook your meals and darn your socks and wash your clothes for you for the rest of my life, and listen to you swear and lay down the law and, when you are a little older, see you spit tobacco juice and begin to take notice of girls that are younger and prettier than me. No sir!"

"Oh, love isn't like that!" exclaimed Douglas vehemently.

"My love won't be like that, I can tell you!" The excitement was still evident in Judith's voice. "I'm not going to kill it by marrying."

"I wish that Inez were dead and in hell!" cried Doug, with such an accumulation of bitterness in his voice that Judith drew a quick breath. "And I wish I could quit loving you. I've tried my best not to. But it just grows as I grow, and every day it's a bigger pain and trouble to me. I wish I could have peace."

"I wish I could have it myself!" ejaculated the girl. She rose suddenly. "I'm so tired of this burning struggle. But I won't settle down to being an old cow on a ranch. I will do something that gives me a chance to use my brain—I will!" She jumped into the saddle.

Douglas seized the bridle.

"Just what do you mean about being tired of a burning struggle?" he exclaimed. "Are you caring for somebody, Jude?"

"Let me go, Douglas!" said Judith.

For a moment the two stared at each other in the failing light. Then Douglas released the bridle and Judith went away.

AT DAWN next day Douglas was half-way up the trail to the pass. He did not know at what hour the preacher would arrive, but he did not intend that the old man should arrive in Lost Chief without his protection. When he reached the crest, he established himself high on a rock and planned to wait patiently. And he had sufficient matter on which to ponder to make the hours pass quickly.

It was mid-afternoon when the stage went through, with old Johnny Brown driving. He did not see Douglas, who had taken pains that he should not. An hour later the preacher rounded the curve just below the crest. Doug mounted and rode to meet him. Fowler was so genuinely delighted to see him that Doug's heart lifted.

"I didn't want the folks to welcome you too warmly, Mr. Fowler, so I just sneaked up here."

"How long have you been waiting?" asked the preacher.

"Since daylight."

"Well, well!" mused Fowler. "It would be a curious thing if you and I turned out to be friends."

Douglas grinned.

"It sure would!" he said.

"What does Lost Chief think of your venture?" asked Fowler.

Douglas described the valley's state of mind without mincing matters.

The older man's jaw set under his beard.

"Humph. They'll find the Lord and me both ready for them. I have an idea they are going to be surprised before they are through with this."

Douglas nodded, and they rode on in silence. When they trotted past the post-office, the usual group was gathered on the steps. Doug and the preacher nodded but did not draw rein.

"What's your hurry, old-timers?" shouted Jimmy Day.

"A long way to go!" called Douglas.

"Your pal needs a shave!" said some one else.

"We'll do it for him Sunday!" cried one of the Brown boys.

"Oil up your old forty-four, Doug! You'll need it," laughed Charleton.

Douglas waved his hand and trotted on sedately.

"I wonder why it is. I wonder why," said Fowler.

"They think we're criticizing them," answered Douglas, adding, with his pleasant grin, "which we are."

Fowler smiled and sighed in return.

He was delighted with the log chapel and the cabin and touchingly pleased when he found that Douglas was to live with him. There was a simplicity and sincerity about Fowler that drew Douglas more and more. They cooked supper, and when they had eaten it, they went to bed and to sleep. It had been a hard day for both of them.

THE next morning, Saturday, Douglas left the preacher while he went down to his father's place for his day's work. All day he was as nervous as a mother with her first baby, and he galloped the Moose back up the trail long before sunset. When Mr. Fowler waved at him from the door of the cabin, he gave a gusty sigh of relief.

While Doug was cooking the bacon for supper, he asked the preacher what was to be the subject of the morrow's sermon.

"I was going to preach on the Golden Rule," replied Mr. Fowler.

"No," said Douglas decidedly. "You give 'em a talk on the hereafter and why you think there is one." He lighted a cigarette and cut more bacon.

"Young man, are you presuming to dictate to me how to preach the word of God?"

"I sure am"—grinning, with the cigarette between his white teeth. "I'm in this thing up to my horns, and I don't aim to make any false moves that I can help. I've been reading the New Testament this summer. So far, the most I've got out of it is that Christ was the most diplomatic preacher that ever lived. Let's be as diplomatic as we can. What's the use of preaching slush to a lot of sensible, hard-thinking folks who don't believe in anything?"

The preacher bit his knuckles and took a turn or two up and down the cabin. Douglas noted, with a little sense of pity, the extreme thinness of the rounded shoulders under the denim jumper. Douglas dished the bacon and put a loaf of Mary's bread beside the fried potatoes.

"Show us that our souls go marching on like old John Brown's," said the young man persuasively, "and you'll have all Lost Chief eating out of your hand."

"You talk of faith," cried Fowler impatiently, "as if it were a problem in algebra!"

Douglas hesitated.

"Maybe I do"—his voice suddenly troubled.

Fowler paused as he was about to seat himself at the table.

"I hear a horse," he said.

Douglas went to the door.

"It's just me," called Grandma Brown's voice. "Come and help me down, Doug. I was up to see your mother this afternoon," she went on, as Douglas helped her dismount, "and I thought I'd come along up and have a visit with the preacher."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Douglas. "Come along in, Grandma. We're just drawing up to the table."

"Good!" sighed the old lady. "I'm half starved. Howdy, Mr. Fowler? Haven't had enough of Lost Chief yet, huh?"

The preacher rose and shook hands.

"Not yet, Mrs. Brown. Will you draw up?"

The old lady plumped down at the table, and Douglas loaded her plate and poured her a cup of coffee.

"The older folks," she said abruptly,

"won't make you any trouble. Charleton Falkner and some of his pals will be smarty, but the young fry will sure try to break up every meeting you have."

"The modern youngsters are pretty rough," sighed the preacher.

"Here in Lost Chief," agreed Grandma promptly, "they are the most rough-and-tumble, catch-as-catch-can batch of young coyotes that ever lived. They don't respect God, man or the devil. And why should they? That's educated into children, not born into them."

"How do you feel about my coming back, Mrs. Brown?" asked Fowler.

Grandma hesitated; then she said:

"I'm too old to be polite, John Fowler. I'm a religious woman myself, and I've often said we'd ought to have a church in Lost Chief. But it isn't men like you can start a church here. You are too religious and too goody-goody."

The preacher winced. Douglas came to his rescue.

"We're going to show Lost Chief that he's not goody-goody."

Grandma shook her head.

"I wish you luck, but with all the nerve in the world you can't preach to them that won't hear."

"Do you know what deviltry they've planned for to-morrow?" asked Douglas.

Grandma shook her head.

"All I know is, Scott Parson is the leader. He sees a chance to get back at you."

Douglas finished his bacon thoughtfully.

"All right," he said finally; "let 'em come. I'm waiting."

"Well," said Grandma briskly, "I didn't come up here to give advice. I wanted a gossip with an old-timer. Mr. Fowler, you was up in Mountain City when that Black Sioux outbreak took place. Did you know Emmy Blake, she that was stolen by old Red Feather?"

"Yes," replied Fowler, with a sudden clearing of his somber face. "I saw her when—" And he plunged into a tale that, matched by one from Grandma, consumed the evening.

At nine o'clock the old lady rose.

"I'll ride down the trail with you," said Douglas.

"Pooh!" sniffed the old lady. "Since when have folks begun nursing me over these trails?"

"That's not the point," returned Doug. "I want to see Peter."

"Well, come along, then," conceded Grandma. She pulled on her mackinaw and buttoned it. The nights were very cold.

THE next morning a placard on the post-office door announced to Lost Chief that a meeting would be held in the log chapel on Sunday at two o'clock. By half after one every soul in the valley capable of moving was in the chapel. It was a very comfortable cabin, fragrant with the odor of fresh spruce logs and the smoke of the cedar knots which roared in the air-tight stove. The benches, with the backs at a comfortable angle, were arranged pew-fashion down the center of the room, facing the platform and table.

After his talk with Peter, Douglas had changed his program. The postmaster, not the preacher, sat at the table. He wore a black coat over a blue-flannel shirt, a coat that Lost Chief never saw except at funerals or weddings. His denim pants were turned up with a deep cuff over his riding-boots. The preacher sat in a chair, just below the platform. Douglas occupied a rear pew, where he could keep an eye on Scott Parson. There was very little talking among the members of the congregation, but much spitting of tobacco juice into the red-hot stove.

Promptly at two o'clock Peter rose and cleared his throat.

"Well, folks, Douglas says he's trying to put into practise some of the stuff I've been preaching to him. So I suppose I'm to blame for this meeting. Now, there isn't anybody can accuse me of being religious——"

"A fourth-class postmaster couldn't be religious," interrupted Charleton Falkner.

"They always go crazy about the second year of office," volunteered John Spencer.

Everybody laughed, even Peter; then he went on:

"So, when I say I'm going to back Doug up in this experiment, you none of you can say it's because I'm pious. It's because I think Lost Chief ought to have a church to help the young people decide the right and wrong of things."

"How come, Peter?" demanded Jimmy Day. "Ain't the young folks round here pleasing to your bachelor eyes?"

"To my eyes, yes!" answered the postmaster. "Best-looking crowd I ever saw. But to my mind, no! And there isn't one of you over fifteen who doesn't know what I mean when I say it. Now, Doug's idea seems sensible enough to me. He says he'd be happier if he could believe in a life after death. He says if any preacher can prove to him that the soul is immortal, he is willing to play the game so as to win that future if it is proved that you have to follow rules to win it. Folks, if there is anything sissy about that, I'd like to have one of you rear up and say so."

"There isn't a preacher in the world can prove that," said Mrs. Falkner. "If there was, he'd be greater than Christ."

"Didn't Christ prove it?" cried Mr. Fowler quickly.

"No," replied Mrs. Falkner. "He believed it Himself, and He lived like He believed it, but He didn't prove it."

Fowler jumped to his feet.

"He proved it over and over by fulfilling the prophecies, by the miracles He performed and by returning after death."

"How do you know He returned after death?" asked Mrs. Falkner.

"The Bible says so."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Falkner. "The Bible is just history, most of it hearsay. And I read in the *Atlantic* the other day that Napoleon said that history was just a lie agreed upon."

"This is blasphemy!" shouted Mr. Fowler. "This is——"

"Wait!" Peter interrupted with a firm hand. "Every one is to say what they decently please. You'll never get anywhere in this valley if you show yourself shocked by anything anybody says."

"I don't want to shock the preacher, Peter"—Mrs. Falkner's beautiful face was wistful—"I'd like to have his faith, I sure Gawd would! But I just want to make him see that to folks like us in Lost Chief, who read and think and look at these hills a lot, the Bible never could prove a hereafter."

"But the Bible is the inspired word of God," insisted Fowler.

"Who says so?" asked Mrs. Falkner.

"The Bible."

"Good heavens, isn't that childish!" She appealed to the congregation. "Seems to me only God could prove that, and we don't even know He exists."

There was silence in the room. Douglas, looking over the backs of many familiar heads, felt a curious yearning affection for these neighbors who so far had met his experiment so kindly. Then his eyes turned to the aspens without the window and beyond these to the far red clouds over Fire Mesa.

The first snow of the season was beginning to sift through the trees. He wished that he had the courage to ask Mrs. Falkner what she thought of Inez's poem:

> A fire-mist and a planet,
> A crystal and a cell——

but he would rather cut out his tongue than repeat the verses before this audience.

Mr. Fowler was running his fingers through his beard, glancing hesitatingly from Douglas to Peter.

"Well, is it the sense of this meeting," asked the postmaster, "to let the preacher tell us how he feels about it?"

"Go to it, old wrangler!" said Charleton. "I can spout the Persian poet to 'em if you run short of Bible stuff."

"Baa-a-a!" bleated a small boy in the back of the room.

"I'm going to give the first young one that makes a disturbance a dose of aspen switch," said Grandma Brown.

THERE was a general chuckle that quieted as Mr. Fowler began to speak.

"Religion doesn't rest on proof. It rests on faith. And faith is something every human being possesses. If you plant a seed, you have faith that it will produce a plant. No power of yours can bring the plant. But you have faith—in what?—that the plant will appear. Every night that you go to bed you believe that a new day will come. You cannot bring that day, but you have absolute faith that a to-morrow will be brought by—by what? The stars come nightly to the sky; the moon and the earth whirl in their appointed places. You have absolute confidence that they will continue to float in the heavens. On what do you place that confidence?

"Friends, I ,cannot prove to you that there is a God. But if you will be patient with me, I will give you a faith that asks no proof." He opened his Bible and began to read. " 'And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst.

" 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

" 'He that believeth in me, believeth not in me but in him that sent me. And he that seeth me, seeth him that sent me. I come a light unto the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness.

" 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' "

Mr. Fowler paused and closed the book.

"Words!" said Charleton. "Just poetry!"

"You are speaking of the living words of the Almighty!" shouted the preacher. "You—" But he was interrupted. There was a sudden unearthly uproar of dogs without. The door burst open, and old Sister, howling at the top of her lungs, bolted straight up the aisle to Peter. A can was tied to her tail. Prince, similarly adorned and ably seconding his old friend's outcry, followed her. Several cats, all dragging tin cans, were flung, spitting and yowling, through a window.

Chaos reigned. Douglas seized Prince. Peter grabbed Sister. A dozen people took after the cats. They were not as easy to capture as the dogs, and during the progress of the chase a sudden noxious odor filled the room. Douglas saw a thick black vapor rising from a bubbling mess on the top of the stove. The congregation bolted, leaving the field to one lone cat, which climbed the wall to the window and disappeared with a final yowl.

There was no attempt to bring the audience back, and shortly the trail was dotted with riders. But that evening, as he sat alone with Douglas, the preacher was not at all sad.

"You were right," he said to the young man, "in having Peter open the meeting. The older people were interested. No doubt they were interested. And, in spite of the mischief that broke us up, I feel as if a start had been made. It's a rarely intelligent group of people; I admit that."

Doug nodded.

"We'll wear 'em down. See if we don't. The kids certainly put it over on me. I was feeling safe as long as I could watch Scott and Jimmy, and they had Grandma Brown's grandson doing the work for them." He chuckled and shook his head. "I just can't head them off on that kind of work. All we can do, as I say, is to wear them down. And maybe we can win Judith and one or two of the others right soon."

Mr. Fowler sighed.

"We can certainly interest some of the older people for a while with a discussion like we had this afternoon. But not the young people. Beauty and emotion and mystery must make the religious appeal to young folks. A church can't exist as a debating society."

Douglas turned this over in his mind, finally focusing his thoughts on Inez—she who who loved beauty and dragged her emotions in the mire.

"Mr. Fowler," he said finally, "I'll bet Inez would have been a very religious person if she'd been started with the beauty and emotions and mystery."

"That's a queer thing to say." The preacher's voice was a little resentful.

Douglas went on as if he had not heard.

"But you can't get Judith that way. She hasn't any emotions except temper and a sense of humor."

"There isn't a woman born who isn't full of emotion," said Mr. Fowler dryly. "And the deeper they conceal it the more they have it. I think I'll go to bed, Douglas. I feel as if I'd come through a hard day."

"Same here," agreed Douglas, and shortly the cabin was in darkness.

FOR a day or so the preacher stayed quietly in and about the cabin. He took a pathetic pride in the little chapel. He swept it and cleaned out the stove and polished the windows, and each day made a little fire. Douglas frequently found him there at night on his knees. At least once a day he said, "It was a wonderful thing, Doug, for a young man like you to build me this little chapel in my old age." He insisted on grace before meals and a chapter aloud from the Bible before bed. Douglas was embarrassed but entirely acquiescent. Mr. Fowler was to have a free hand with his spiritual development.

About the middle of the week, Judith rode down to the post-office with Douglas.

"Well, how's the sky-pilot and his disciple?" she asked.

"I believe the old boy is almost happy," replied Douglas. "He thinks that little old church I built is pretty fine."

"Inez says it looks like a big cow-stable."

"That's nice of Inez! Why didn't she tell me how to make it better-looking?"

"What does Inez care about it? Honest, Doug, you are making an awful fool of yourself. A man like Fowler can't preach to us."

"Why, he's never had a chance to preach here yet!" exclaimed Douglas. "And, anyhow, what do you expect in a place like Lost Chief — a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year sky-pilot? Besides, I don't want preaching from him. I want just the one thing like Peter said. And Fowler has that in him just as strong as the highest paid preacher in the world. Give him a show, Judith. Come up every Sunday. You might back me that much."

"And have everybody in the crowd laughing at me like they are at you? I won't do anything against the old man, Douglas, for your sake, but that's all I'll promise."

"I'm not going to let you off that easy, Jude. Come up to supper to-night. I won't let him talk religion. Honest, he's as interesting as a book when he gets to telling some of his experiences."

Judith shook her head.

"I'd rather stay at home with 'Pendennis.' "

"If I get Inez to come, will you?" urged Douglas.

Judith grinned impishly.

"Yes; I'd come with Inez."

They returned from the post-office via the west trail and stopped at Inez's place. She was eating a belated dinner in her slatternly kitchen and waved a hospitable hand over the table.

"Thanks, no," said Doug. "I just stopped by to see if you and Judith wouldn't come up and have supper with the sky-pilot and me. I won't let him talk religion, and he's got some good stories to tell."

Inez looked Douglas over. He and Judith seemed to fill the kitchen. Doug finally had covered his big frame with muscles, and he was a larger and handsomer man than his father.

"Doug," said Inez, "I am truly flattered. What are you trying to do? Convert me?"

Douglas answered, with simple sincerity, "I don't care a hang whether you get converted or not."

"Oh, you don't? Well, just to spite you, I'll come and let the old fellow try his hand."

"Not really, Inez?" gasped Judith.

"I'll do more than that for Doug and for Lost Chief," said Inez soberly. "Doug isn't the only person who loves this old hole in the hills."

Judith turned to Douglas with a sudden wistfulness in her eyes, a sudden flare of a fire he had not seen in them before. He waited for her to speak, but she only turned away toward the door.

"I'll look for you about six, then, Inez," he said, and he followed Judith.

WHEN the girls appeared at the cabin that evening, it was in apparent order. The table was set and the steak was frying. Inez and Judith winked at each other when Mr. Fowler said grace, but otherwise the meal progressed decorously enough. It was Inez who brought up the tabued subject. They had been sitting round the stove listening to a tale of old lynch law which the preacher told with real skill, when Inez interrupted him with entire irrelevance.

"Mr. Fowler, do you really believe there is such a thing as right and wrong?"

The preacher paused, studying Inez's face. Her dark eyes were steady and thoughtful. Her mouth, except for the slightly heavy lower lip, was sensitive. Her whole expression was one of pride and independence.

"Yes; I believe in right and wrong," replied Mr. Fowler deliberately.

"What makes you believe that a man who lived nearly two thousand years ago can decide what is right or wrong for Lost Chief?" she asked.

"The Bible," answered the preacher.

"But the Bible is full of things that I would call crooked. Those early prophets were always putting slick tricks over on each other and the people. There was a lot of dirty work done in the name of the Lord by those ancient Jews."

The preacher leaned toward the woman.

"Do you believe in right and wrong, Inez Rodman?"

"No, I don't. I believe in kindness and in beauty—that's all."

"How does one believe in beauty?" asked Mr. Fowler.

"I mean," she replied, "that if you fill your mind with the beauty of this Lost Chief country and with poetry, there is no room for anything ugly."

"What would you call 'ugly'?"

"Being mean to other people is one kind of ugliness."

"That's what I believe, too," said Judith suddenly.

"Then, of course, neither of you two would have anything to do with the attempt to run the preacher out," suggested Douglas.

"No, I wouldn't," replied Inez, "and I told Scott so. That doesn't mean that I don't consider you plumb loco, Doug. Mr. Fowler isn't the kind to make the folks see the beauty of these hills. If he was, I'd be helping, instead of indifferent."

"If the folks would let God enter their hearts," cried the preacher, "they'd see beauty in these hills they never dreamed of!"

"Well, as far as beauty goes, Inez"—Douglas spoke thoughtfully—"you can't say there isn't considerable of that in the Bible. Take the Songs of Solomon. There never was finer love-making than that."

"The Songs of Solomon don't deal with human passion," said Mr. Fowler hastily. "They are a recital of a man's love for the Almighty and His works."

"Oh, no, Mr. Fowler!" said Doug. " 'Behold thou art fair, my loved one; behold thou art fair. Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.' No man ever said that about anything but a woman."

No one spoke for a moment. Old Prince, who was lying with his head baking under the stove, growled and barked, then made for the door. A dog barked without.

"Sister!" exclaimed Inez. "Peter must be coming."

Douglas opened the door and Prince shot out. Shortly Peter, then Charleton, came in, stamping the snow from their spurs and pulling off their gauntlets.

"Where did you two come from?" asked Judith, as the newcomers established themselves on upended boxes close to the stove.

"Just met here," replied Peter. "I had supper at Spencer's and came up to argue with the sky-pilot."

"I'm setting traps up on Lost Chief," said Charleton, lighting a cigarette.

"Look out you don't mistake any of Scott's traps for yours," suggested Inez.

Everybody chuckled and Peter said:

"Elijah Nelson was down at my place yesterday. He's a pleasant, easy-spoken man. I guess he and Scott have been having a lot of quiet fighting up there."

"Is that what he came to see you about?" asked Doug.

"No. It seems his trail out to the Mountain City road is snowed up. He wants to get his mail over here if Scott will let him use his trail. He wants me to speak to Scott about it."

"What Scott will claim"—Charleton smiled—"is that he positively must have a retired location and complete privacy on his trail."

There was another chuckle, during which the preacher looked from one keen face to another, but he did not speak.

"What has the scrapping been about, Peter?" asked Inez.

DOUGLAS turned quietly to look at her. It suddenly occurred to him that Inez used Peter's name with a cadence that was new to him. She was watching Peter's thin, sallow face with a shadow of strain about her eyes.

"Oh, it's about a bull again," laughed Peter. "It seems that Scott has an old red bull that Nelson says is one of his, rebranded."

"But I thought—" began Judith; then she caught Charleton's sardonic eye and subsided.

"What did you think, Judith?" asked Peter.

"Nothing. Go on with your story."

"There is no story to it. Scott's been keeping a six-shooter guard on the upper springs of Lost Chief so's old Nelson hasn't had but half his usual allowance of water for his ditches. He is sorer about that than he is over the bull, though he certainly is determined to get the critter back. But he got small comfort out of me. I told him to keep his plural fingers off of Lost Chief Creek or he would lose more than an old red bull."

"Right-o!" grunted Charleton.

"Are you going to ask Scott to let Nelson use his trail, Peter?" asked Inez.

"Sure. Why not?" laughed Peter.

"You will make Scott sore at you," replied Inez. "I haven't any quarrel with Scott myself, but I know he has a mean streak in him. If he thinks you are in cahoots with Nelson, he will make you trouble."

"I'm not afraid of Scott," said Peter.

"Well, you'll need to be if you mix up in his affairs. He holds grudges over nothing."

"Awful bad man, Scott." Douglas spoke with his quiet smile.

"I'm telling you he is!" insisted Inez. "He has been more than half in love with Judith for years, and he'd just as soon double-cross Jude as anybody else. I want you to let him alone, please, Peter."

Peter was watching Judith. Only Douglas seemed aware of the concentrated entreaty in Inez's voice. "Poor Inez!" he thought. "If she's caring for Peter, she'll be having her little double hell for everything she's done."

He looked at Peter. Judith was staring thoughtfully at the stove, and the postmaster's deep eyes were fastened on the girl's face with a burning fire that suddenly brought Doug's heart to his throat.

"What's your opinion of Scott, Judith?" asked Peter.

"The same as Inez's. But I can't help liking him. He's done me lots of favors, and he's kept me from making a fool of myself a number of times, even if he did double-cross me once. And he admires me. He certainly does!" She laughed with girlish naïveté, and the others joined her.

"Then you must like me, too," said Peter.

"You are a nice old gentleman," retorted Judith.

The preacher spoke with sudden vehemence.

"Yet you people are allowing this same Scott to try to destroy Douglas's dream for Lost Chief."

"I say Scott is a valuable citizen," drawled Charleton. "He guards us from Mormons, from Christians and from wild women."

Douglas did not join in the laugh that greeted this sally. An entirely new fear had come upon him. He bit his lip and stared from Judith to Peter and back again.

Inez rose suddenly.

"Well, the moon is up. Come, Judith; it's time for wild women to retire to their caves."

Judith gave a gigantic yawn, stretched her beautiful long body till the tops of her fingers almost touched the low rafters and said,

"It's a good thing Charleton and Peter will be going along to protect us from Scott, the bad man."

The four presently jingled off down the snowy trail. Prince took up his shivering night watch on the steps. Douglas and Mr. Fowler looked at each other soberly and went to bed.

THE next afternoon Douglas made a trip to the post-office. Peter was alone in his room.

"Well, Peter," he asked, "did you have a run-in with Scott?"

"Not at all. Scott said Elijah was welcome to use the trail if he kept to it."

Doug's mouth opened and closed. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Any mail for me to-day?"

"Nothing. That was a pleasant party last night. Douglas, how are you and Judith getting along?"

"I report no progress," grunted Douglas.

"She's the real thing, Jude is," said Peter. "Now you are a few miles away from her, she will learn a lot about you."

"Do you honestly want me to have Jude, Peter?" asked Douglas, with a sudden huskiness in his voice.

Peter, who was standing by the window mending his rider's belt, looked up at Douglas with surprise in the lift of his brows.

"What are you driving at, Doug?"

Douglas took a quick turn up and down the room, then paused before Peter, his sensitive mouth twitching.

"Peter, I've thought of nothing else since last night—something about the way you looked at her. You are the best friend I have, Peter, but I couldn't give Jude up, even to you. It would be like trying to tear the veins out of my body. I couldn't!"

The older man put the rider's belt carefully on the window-ledge, walked over to the table and slowly filled his pipe. When he had filled it, he laid it down beside the belt, put his hands in his pockets and turned to Doug, who, with a cold sweat standing on his forehead, had watched Peter's every movement.

The outcome of Douglas's interesting missionary experiment is told in the concluding instalment of "Godless Valley." See May EVERYBODY'S—out April 15th.

Ambush

The Deadly Contrast, in Play Form, between the Man Who Would Retain the Right to Respect Himself and the Man with Plenty of Money and No Conscience

By Arthur Richman

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W*ALTER NICHOLS* has no material ambitions. Honor, decency, character—these are the things that matter to him. He is gentle, almost benevolent, a clerk at forty-five, as he was at twenty-five, with a modest home in Jersey City. Life for him has been a continuous struggle, but it has bred no bitterness.

To *Harriet*, his wife, his comparative contentment has seemed merely lack of ambition, and she mistrusts his judgment on almost every question. As a matter of fact, the natural dignity of his character has bred in her a vague respect for his feelings mixed with resentment for his aloofness. *Harriet* has performed her duties faithfully but grudgingly, and year by year little bitternesses have piled up in her heart. It is only *Walter's* love of peace that prevents clashes, for she loves to "have her say."

Saturday evening, when *Walter* turns over his thin pay-envelope, furnishes her with an opportunity to discourse on aims and values. To-night she has added cause for complaint, for the *Seymour Jennisons*, their friends, have just had a stroke of luck.

HARRIET: Mrs. Jennison was here today. You know, Seymour's made a lot o' money this year. They've got that new automobile he was always talking about.

WALTER: I'm glad of that. Owning things means a lot to a man like Seymour.

HARRIET: I suppose owning things don't mean a lot to other people, too!

WALTER: To some more than to others.

HARRIET (*scornfully*): Yes, I know. *You* care about character and principles and things like that. Lot o' good it does you!

WALTER: You're so practical and matter of fact. Nothing worries you, or, if it does, not for long. I'm different. I fret over trifles.

HARRIET: As long as you know you do, why don't you stop?

WALTER (*in a serious tone*): I'm worried about Margaret.

HARRIET. What's the matter with Margaret?

WALTER: Some things Harry Gleason said that you didn't hear—they're partly true. He feels that Margaret cares to know only people of wealth. That's what I understand him to mean.

HARRIET: Why do you take any stock in what *he* says? He likes Margaret, and he hates having her go with anybody else.

WALTER: I seem to notice the same thing in her myself.

HARRIET: That she only cares about people with money? I guess three-quarters of the world is like that.

Margaret comes in. She is very pretty, in nature more her mother's daughter than her father's. She resents the fate that compels her to live in a middle-class environment, and she keeps before her the picture of a more luxurious life to come.

WALTER: Where are you going to-night, dear?

MARGARET: Just motoring—with Alan Kraigne.

WALTER: Mr. Kraigne and you alone? No one else?

MARGARET: We might pick up some friends of his—I don't know.

WALTER: I'd take a wrap—it's only June, and it may blow up cooler.

MARGARET: They always have wraps in the car.

WALTER: What time will you be home?

MARGARET (*angrily*): For heaven's sake, stop asking questions! (*Walter starts to speak.*) I know what you'll say—it's only your love for me. But I'm nearly twenty, dad, and for two years I've been working in New York. I think I'm entitled to do as I please *once* in a while.

WALTER: There's only one thing, Margaret: when you stay out late, I worry. I can't help it—I'm made like that. (*He stops suddenly, and stares at Margaret's wrist.*) That bracelet—that's something new, isn't it?

MARGARET (*alarmed*): Why, that— (*She casts an appealing glance at her mother.*)

HARRIET: It's just a little thing Margaret bought the other day. It ain't real.

WALTER: But that's so—so vulgar.

HARRIET: What is?

WALTER: Wearing imitation jewelry.

MARGARET (*with spirit*): It's the only thing I've got.

WALTER: I detest doing things like that. Suppose the people out here should see you wearing it. They won't know it's imitation, and they'll wonder who gave it to you.

HARRIET: Who cares what people say?

WALTER: I'm surprised that you should encourage it. I wish you would take if off, Margaret, and we'll see if it can be returned next week. Please, dear. I'll buy something real for you at your next birthday. (*He holds out his hand, and Margaret, on the verge of tears, takes off the bracelet and gives it to him.*) Your mother can ask them to take it back the next time she goes there.

MARGARET: I'm getting sick of all this. (*Margaret is usually sweet in voice and manner, but at times like this a certain hardness creeps into her tone.*)

HARRIET: I don't blame her. Young people are young people—if she feels like having such things, let her have 'em.

WALTER: You shouldn't come between us in a case like this, Harriet. Can't you see my reason? Can't you see the vulgarity of pretending to be what you aren't?

HARRIET: Everybody pretends. Making a fuss about a fool thing like that! (*To Margaret.*) I told you not to wear it while your father was around. I know the way he is. (*She goes out.*)

PRESENTLY *Alan Kraigne* calls for *Margaret*, and, with a promise not to drive too far, she goes off with him.

Seymour Jennison and his wife drive up shortly afterward in their new car. *Seymour* is an aggressive, opinionated, loud-talking man of the salesman type. His wife, Julia, is far more wholesome, but she has been trained to back up her husband in all he says and does. He has recently invested in Magnificus Oil stock, and oil is now the burden of his talk.

SEYMOUR: Some people call it "luck," the way I got into this thing. But it ain't luck—it's grasping an opportunity. I saw from the prospectus that the property they owned was one of the most valuable oil-producing properties in the country. Remember, Julia, how I came home and said so? And I knew that, with intelligent direction, the output could be increased and increased and increased until— It's tremendous, tremendous! In Heaven's name, Walter Nichols, why don't you take a chance?

WALTER (*slowly, ill at ease*): I'm a conservative, Seymour. Besides, what have I got to take chances with? Even if I wanted to, I mean.

SEYMOUR: Enough for a starter. What did *I* have? Only Julia's money, and there wasn't much of that. But Julia had courage. What about Harriet and Margie? Don't you owe it to them to have some ambition?

WALTER: It isn't fair of you, Seymour, to assume that I have no ambition. I may have ambitions as well as you, but not the same kind.

SEYMOUR: Then the sooner you get the same kind the better.

Seymour and his wife leave, promising to come back later in the evening. *Harriet* is in a worse than usual state of mind over the combined effects of the bracelet episode and the *Jennisons'* sudden affluence.

Gradually their talk gets round to the bracelet and the *Jennisons*, and *Harriet* brings up the question of selling ten thousand dollars' worth of government bonds which *Walter's* brother left them, and investing

Photograph by Morrall.

Florence Eldridge as *Margaret Nichols* in "Ambush."

the money in Magnificus Oil. They are still on this topic when the *Jennisons* return.

Harriet and *Julia* go to the pantry to make lemonade, and *Walter* begs *Seymour* to refrain from urging him to invest before *Harriet*. He opens his dispatch-box, which is lying on the desk.

WALTER: In this I keep the only treasure I possess. My brother Richard left me ten thousand dollars in his will, and I converted it into United States Treasury notes.

SEYMOUR (*scornfully*): Four and a half per cent.!

WALTER: This is good enough for me, Seymour.

SEYMOUR: What's the rest? Jewelry? (*Looking at the bracelet, which Walter had locked away in his box.*)

WALTER (*embarrassed*): Some cheap thing of Margaret's.

SEYMOUR: Damned if I understand you, Walter! And I'm afraid *you* don't understand your family.

He examines the bracelet closely under the light. *Seymour* has been in the jewelry business, and when he realizes the value of the trinket, he can't quite make out Walter—always the simplest of men.

WALTER (*deprecatingly, and uneasy at Seymour's close scrutiny*): Of course you know what it's worth.

SEYMOUR: I can't guarantee to come nearer than two or three hundred, but the stones are very fine quality.

WALTER (*slowly, turning pale*): Very—fine—quality?

SEYMOUR: The stones. And the setting's a peach! It's a new piece, isn't it?

WALTER: You're sure it's very good?

SEYMOUR: Of course. I know jewelry. But you must know what it's worth if you bought it.

WALTER (*quickly*): Of course— Seymour, will you do me a favor? Don't mention the bracelet to Harriet or Margaret. You see, it only reminds them and causes trouble.

SEYMOUR (*dryly*): It ought to. But don't be afraid; I won't mention it.

MARGARET did not return from her ride with *Alan Kraigne* that night. At eleven on Sunday morning, *Walter* is pacing the dining-room floor. His wife tries to allay his fears by saying that they had doubtless stayed the night with a cousin of *Alan's* in Orange—a girl *Margaret* has often referred to. This does not satisfy *Walter*. It has come too close on the heels of *Seymour's* revelation about the bracelet.

The *Jennisons* had invited *Walter* and *Harriet* to go motoring, but when they come, *Walter* excuses himself. He cannot go with such an uneasy mind. *Harriet* goes off with them, however, her desire for pleasure, which has been rare in her sparse life, exceeding her maternal qualms. She gives a final injunction to *Walter* not to anger *Margaret* when she returns.

When the girl does come in presently, she is nervous and anxious, but her tone quickly changes to defiance under her father's close questioning. She corroborates her mother's explanation that she was with *Alan's* cousin last night. He is tender but determined, and finally wrings from her the fact that the bracelet was a gift from *Alan*.

WALTER: Men don't make gifts like that unless they are very fond of a girl.

MARGARET: What do you know about such men? They're not like you and your friends. (*Then archly.*) As a matter of fact, though, Alan does like me.

WALTER: It's more than that!

MARGARET (*trying to be angry, but actually frightened*): What do you mean by that?

WALTER (*looking at her closely*): Dearest—(*Margaret bursts into tears, and for an instant he cannot go on.*) Oh, my little girl, all I want in the world is to see you happy! Whatever has happened, I will never blame you—never! Trust me. If you have made some mistake—nobody need ever, ever know. Just you and I, darling—no one else. Why, I'll surround you with tenderness and love——

MARGARET: I'm not good enough to touch you! (*His fear now becomes a certainty; he looks before him with dull eyes and open mouth; then there is a moment of silence.*) I wasn't to blame! I swear I wasn't to blame!

WALTER: I'm sure you weren't, dear—I'm sure.

MARGARET: I shall never see him again. And if he comes here, we mustn't see him, father—not you, either.

WALTER: Do you love him, dear?

MARGARET: Do you think, if I didn't——

WALTER: No! No! I understand. He made love to you; he made you believe—Did he promise to marry you?

Margaret: He loved me, father, and he promised to marry me, and *I* loved *him*.

Walter: Of course, dear—what a fool I was not to understand! (*Furiously.*) These men with plenty of money and no conscience dangle their gifts and their promises before a girl's eyes——

Margaret: He would marry me, only—only, his people won't let him.

Walter: He has told you that?

Margaret: His father would disinherit him if he did. My life is ruined! I don't care now *what* happens to me.

Walter: No, Margaret. Everything can be all right—it depends on the future.

Margaret: You'll trust me?

Walter: Always! (*Holding her tightly.*)

Margaret: You must never mention this again, daddy — never! I could not stand it.

Walter: After to-day, not a word will be said. It's our secret. Your mother will never suspect—you'll see.

He kisses her tenderly, and, the tears starting fresh from her eyes, she rushes from him and hurries up the stairs.

Walter goes to the telephone and calls up *Alan Kraigne's* father. *Mr. Kraigne* is a frequent visitor at the office where *Walter* works, and a pleasant business friendship has existed between them for a long time.

He gives *Kraigne* an inkling of the situation between *Margaret* and *Alan* and asks him to come to see him about it. *Howard Kraigne* arrives several hours later. *Walter*, with great difficulty, tells him just what *Margaret* told him, concluding with the episode of spending the night in Orange with *Alan's* cousin.

Kraigne: I'm afraid there's some mistake, Nichols. Miss Lydall, with her mother and father, visited us this morning, and all three mentioned that they hadn't seen Alan for weeks.

Walter: Then last night— (*He turns away from Kraigne, unwilling to have the latter see his grief.*)

Kraigne (*sympathetically*): I know how you feel. I don't pretend I can put myself in your place for I'm a pretty callous person, but I recognize your grief and I respect it—more than that, my dear Nichols, I shall do all in my power to dispel it. If my son gained your daughter's confidence through promise of marriage, I shall demand that he keep his word.

Alan Kraigne comes to the house while his father is talking. He has not been home and so did not get *Margaret's* telephoned message that she could not see him this afternoon. His father acquaints him with the reason for his visit, and *Alan* denies hotly that he promised to marry *Margaret*. She hears his voice and rushes down to the dining-room. She is infuriated to the point of hysteria at being under discussion, and as nothing can be got out of her except "I wouldn't marry him now if he went on his knees and asked me to," *Alan* and his father leave. *Margaret* turns on her father.

Margaret: I hope you're satisfied now, you fool! Why can't you let me handle my own affairs? Why do you have to butt in and make a mess of everything? Don't tell me again you did it for the best!

Walter: I thought you loved each other and that——

Margaret: Do you suppose he'd tell the truth in front of his father? That's why I wouldn't wait to hear Alan's explanation. The minute I saw how kind Mr. Kraigne was, I knew Alan had lied to me. (*She begins to weep.*) What's to become of me now?

Walter: It's just as I told you before they came. The idea that a girl's life is wrecked because she makes a single mistake is ridiculous. (*As Margaret starts to go, he recalls something.*) Margaret—what did young Mr. Kraigne mean by saying, "If there were any good reason why I should marry her?"

Margaret: How should I know?

Walter (*his eyes distressed*): There—there has never been any one else?

Margaret: Oh! (*She is furious again and her voice is loud.*) This is more than I'll stand! You've gone too far this time! Now you'll be sorry for it! (*He tries to take her hand, she draws back her arm and strikes him on the side of the face.*) Damn you! Damn you!

WALTER is crushed and dazed by *Margaret's* attitude, and his wife and the *Jennisons* find him vague and far off when they return from their ride. A decision has taken place in *Walter's* mind. He will sell his Treasury notes and invest in Magnificus Oil and give *Margaret* the pretty things she craves.

He tells his intention to his wife and

(Above) *Howard Kraigne* (Edward Donnelly) confronts his son *Alan* (Noel Leslie) with what he has learned from *Nichols* (Frank Reicher). The boy denies hotly that he promised to marry *Margaret* (Florence Eldridge). "I wouldn't marry him now if he went on his knees and asked me to," the girl declares.

Margaret is overcome by her father's generosity. "Father, I don't deserve your kindness! I'm a wicked girl!"

Photographs by Ira D. Schwarz.

daughter, and *Margaret* is suddenly grief-stricken.

MARGARET: Father, I don't deserve your kindness! I'm a wicked girl! But I'll never do anything to hurt you again. Just forgive me this time, daddy, and I'll never be wicked again; I'll do anything I can to deserve your love!

SIX months pass, and Magnificus Oil has not fulfilled the claims of its prospectus and of *Seymour Jennison.* One night, a week before Christmas, *Walter* comes home thoroughly disheartened. The bottom dropped out of Magnificus Oil, and his ten thousand dollars are gone—and he has lost his position. After seventeen years of service, he was discharged for several slight errors on the books.

He has been harassed for weeks by the possibility of losing his money, and his work has suffered. He is not bitter or resentful, only dismayed and baffled.

Seymour Jennison, in his little moment of affluence, bought the Nichols house and now he comes in with his wife, railing at the Magnificus Oil Company and demanding his rent. *Walter* hasn't enough money to pay it, but promises to do so soon. With bluster and a threat, *Seymour* goes out. His wife stays behind a moment to talk to *Walter.*

MRS. JENNISON: I'm awfully sorry things happened like this, Walter. I wanted to tell you not to go in with Seymour, but I was afraid it would be disloyal.

WALTER: Not to go in! Did you know anything about it?

MRS. JENNISON: Not a thing. It's only this: some people seem kind of marked to go through life without success—have you ever noticed that? I'm afraid Seymour's that kind. This sounds as if I was finding fault, but I'm not. Seymour means so well, and I understand him and love him. But sometimes— Were you ever very tired, Walter, and knew that you had to keep going—so tired that just to hold your head up hurt the back of your neck? That's how I am. I want to rest—just to stop everything and rest a long, long time. (*As he is about to speak.*) Oh, I'm not tired of keeping house and marketing and mending socks—I'm tired of having to be ambitious. I knew you were, too—that's why I stopped to talk to you. I thought it might help you to know I understood, and I thought it might help *me* if *you* understood.

WALTER: How did you know it was that way with me?

MRS. JENNISON: I saw it in lots of things. I used to notice how contented you were to let things slide along, and the pride you took in simply being decent.

WALTER (*after a moment*): It's hard, sometimes.

MRS. JENNISON: It's a curse to be born like this—we take things so hard that other people brush aside. Because sometimes you *can't* keep your principles. Sometimes Fate seems to close in on you from every side—to get you into an ambush—and you've got to give up. Don't tell Seymour about this conversation—he'd think I was crazy.

WALTER: An ambush!

MRS. JENNISON: Isn't that what it is? The other forces—the things we're fighting against—come in on you like this until there's no way to turn.

Margaret comes down as *Mrs. Jennison* is leaving. She is wearing a beautiful dinner gown and carrying an expensive fur-trimmed wrap. *Mrs. Jennison* tells her about the failure of the oil company, and *Margaret* makes one of her quick transitions from bright airiness to a sullen humor.

WALTER: Do you—do you despise me for for not having good luck?

MARGARET: It's funny the way *some men* manage to succeed.

George Lithridge, Alan Kraigne's successor, arrives to take *Margaret* out to dinner, and *Margaret* draws him into the pantry for a whispered conference. *Harriet* seems to know what is going on, for she tells her husband that *George* will probably help them out of their difficulties by giving *Walter* a job if only he will be sensible about it. They are interrupted by *Harry Gleason, Margaret's* old sweetheart, who comes in much the worse for liquor. He tells *Walter* that *George* is a married man with several children, and when *Margaret* offers her father money which she got from *George* for the rent, *Harry* bursts out:

"Why do you suppose that fellow is doing all this? Do you suppose there's nothing more between them than friendship?"

WALTER (*to Margaret*): You—you knew he was married all the time? (*Suddenly he breaks out.*) I can't believe it! I won't!

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MARGARET (*indicating* HARRY): Do we have to talk about this in front of him?

WALTER (*weakly*): I don't understand any of it. All I know is that everything—everything—is going to pieces!

MARGARET: Why wouldn't it, when a man thinks more of fine ideas than he does of supporting his family?

WALTER: It's all Alan Kraigne's fault. If he hadn't deceived you—made promises and then lied about them—none of this would have happened.

MARGARET: He didn't lie to me. He didn't promise to marry me. Oh, the time has come for a show-down, and you might as well know the truth.

WALTER: The truth! The truth!

MARGARET: That I belonged to somebody else before he met me. (*Harry is at the door. Her eyes, narrow and full of hatred, are upon him. She points to him.*) Him!

HARRY: You're crazy!

MARGARET: Why do you suppose he was so mad when I went around with Alan? Why do you suppose he told you about George being married—though I suppose you'd have found that out if you were working for him. But I don't care any more what you find out. If all this makes you unhappy, it's your own fault.

WALTER: Have you no shame?

MARGARET: I'm not going to discuss *that*. If I wanted to, I could leave here to-night and never come back. Don't you suppose I could live in New York if I wanted to?

WALTER: Not—not if his wife knew about it.

MARGARET: She *does* know. Oh, not who I am—George is too much of a gentleman to let her learn my name. But they haven't lived together for a year. Now listen; I'd rather stay here—it looks better, and it'll be easier some day when I want to get married. Besides, I'm fond of mother and you. But if I do stay, I'll live as I please, and I won't have questions and criticisms. You see this coat? Well, you may as well know that I've got lots of things up-stairs you've never seen. After this I'll wear them.

WALTER: From—from Mr. Lithridge?

MARGARET: You don't suppose I'd accept things from any one else? What kind of a girl do you think I am? There's the money for the rent, if you want to use it. And remember about the job.

She moves toward the door, and *Walter* breaks out wildly. Their raised voices bring *Harriet* in. *Walter* subsides, thinking to keep everything from her, but this is to be his day of revelations.

HARRIET: I know all about everything. I've known it all along.

WALTER: You—what do you mean?

HARRIET: That bracelet—do you suppose I ever thought it was imitation? I was the one who said it was because I saw there'd be trouble if I didn't. That day I came back after riding with the Jennisons she told me how you acted about Alan Kraigne, and it was all I could do to keep her from leaving us.

WALTER: You—you knew all, then? You helped her lie to me? What's to become of her now?

HARRIET: That depends upon us, I guess. If we keep her here and make the best of it, things may turn out all right. The question for us now is: What are we going to do? How are you going to prevent Margaret from going to New York if she wants to?

WALTER: Let her go there! She'll continue her shameless life wherever she is—but you won't go.

HARRIET: Don't you know that, if she goes, it's the very time she'll need me most? No, Walter; the only thing for you to do is to swallow that pride of yours and take the job Mr. Lithridge offers you.

The *Jennisons* come back to make peace, and *Harriet* tells them that *Walter* has a job. *Walter* is beyond thought or protest.

SEYMOUR: If that's so, I suppose I can expect my rent before long.

Walter looks at him dully for a minute and then goes heavily to the desk, takes out *Lithridge's* money and hands it to *Seymour*.

WALTER: Everything I stood for—everything I lived for—everything God put me on the earth for—turns out wrong. What can I do now?

MRS. JENNISON: Whatever has happened, you must go on just the same.

WALTER: Why? Why? Why?

Next month's play will be "The Dover Road," by A. A. Milne, whom readers will remember as the author of our recent absorbing serial, "The Red House Murder." See May EVERYBODY'S—out April 15th.

A New Adventure of Dr. Goodrich—Scientist and Detective

The Accusing Voice

Since Reading of the Wireless Telephone, Have You Ever Pondered the Possibilities It Held—What Use a Criminal, for Instance, Could Make of It?

By Stoddard Goodhue

SEVERAL of the guests at the Chipmunk Inn knew that Archibald Burke had taken up his stay there by his physician's orders. They saw in him, and came to know and like, a young man, good-looking, and pleasant in his manner. He played golf sometimes, and he was always ready to join in the impromptu dancing on Saturday night, when the habit of going to bed early, which usually prevailed at the inn, was broken.

Archie Burke was a victim of his nerves when he first came to the inn. He had, he told several persons, among them Miss Wilkinson, been sleeping very badly, and had reached the point when any sudden noise made him jump. Miss Wilkinson suggested that the war might have had something to do with his nervous condition. (Her questions had already drawn from Archie, although he spoke of himself reluctantly, that he had served overseas and had seen some heavy fighting.) And, while he deprecated this explanation, Miss Wilkinson felt that she was right, and told other guests—cronies of hers—what she thought. In view of what happened later, this is important, because nearly every one at the inn liked Mr. Burke and was, to that extent, prejudiced in his favor. Their unanimous testimony was, therefore, the more credible.

Until Mr. and Mrs. Verplank also came to the inn, nothing happened to distinguish Archie Burke's visit from that which any man convalescing from an illness or trying to avert one might have made to any health resort. He was markedly better when the Verplanks came. Miss Wilkinson, who took—not a motherly interest; no. To suggest that would be ungallant. Let us say that she took the interest in him that a young maiden aunt might take in a favorite nephew. Miss Wilkinson, at any rate, was able to assure her friends that Mr. Burke was distinctly improved. He was sleeping so well that the telephone operator, little Miss Hathaway, sometimes had to ring his bell six or seven times in the morning before he answered when he had left word that he wanted to be called at a particular time.

The Verplanks were people of some means who lived at East Milton, ten or fifteen miles from the inn. Every one in the neighborhood knew them, or about them, and it was not long before Miss Wilkinson was able to tell her friends what was of interest concerning them. Briefly stated, it came to this:

Mrs. Verplank was—as every one could, of course, see—very good-looking and much younger than her husband. Mr. Verplank, a well-known New York lawyer, was a distinguished man approaching middle age, much more settled in his habits and ways, naturally, than his young and pleasure-loving wife. Miss Wilkinson understood that he had been the executor of her father's will, and so, perhaps, almost her guardian—which suggested that Mrs. Verplank had money of her own. That was true; Miss Wilkinson knew that Mrs. Verplank's father had been a rich man.

Later, there was more matter for Miss Wilkinson's active tongue. For Mr. Burke, it appeared, was paying marked attention to Mrs. Verplank. Miss Wilkinson, who, quite naturally, did not approve, said she thought it would be a very good thing indeed when the alterations to the East Milton house were finished and they went home. It was on account of the presence of the workmen in the house that they were staying at the inn—although Mr. Verplank from time to time motored over and spent a night at home, when some detail of the work required his attention early the next morning.

As a matter of fact, Archie Burke, had Miss Wilkinson only known it, shared her views as to what may be called his flirtation with Mrs. Verplank. He hadn't meant to be drawn into anything of the sort. He liked Mrs. Verplank and enjoyed dancing with her. But he had no mind to play the comforter to a misunderstood wife, and he soon learned that she had cast herself in that rôle. Her husband never wanted to enjoy things as she did, she said; he didn't like to be out in the evening; he didn't seem to remember that she was young and entitled to some pleasure and gaiety.

But it is easier to become involved in such a situation than to escape from it. Archie Burke was a chivalrous and polite young man, and he was not vain; the discovery that his perfunctory and simply polite attentions to Mrs. Verplank seemed likely to rouse warmer sentiments in her shocked him and disturbed him a good deal.

But it was Mr. Verplank himself who caused such trouble as there was in the end. He suddenly began to show himself a jealous husband, and when, one Saturday night, he came upon his wife and Burke on the veranda, where they had gone for a breath of air between dances, he ordered her in in a manner Burke found it very hard not to resent. Moreover, he made something very closely approaching a scene inside.

It had been Burke's intention to leave the inn almost at once, to avoid the possibility of any unpleasant *contretemps*. But quite naturally, as even Miss Wilkinson later admitted, he did not want to put himself in the position of seeming to be driven away by Verplank's behavior. So he postponed his departure.

Nearly enough has been told of the events and circumstances that led up to the extraordinary and tragic occurrence that must presently be related. But one or two more salient points remain to be brought out.

Archie Burke occupied two rooms on the second floor of the inn; the Verplanks were in the adjoining and precisely similar suite. The rooms were on the second floor. Room twenty-one was Archie's sitting-room; room twenty, next door, of course, his bedroom. His bathroom was tucked away in one corner of the bedroom. Now, next door was an exactly similar suite; room nineteen was a bedroom, precisely like Burke's; room eighteen a living-room. And outside these four rooms was a balcony, to which their windows—tall, French affairs—gave access.

These two suites represented the best accomodations the inn had to offer; the balcony was held to make them especially desirable, although it was so narrow that no one ever used it so far as Burke could see.

IT WAS on a Friday night that the thing happened. Mrs. Verplank had told several people that she was tired and that, as she was leaving for New York on the morning train, she was going to bed early. Her husband was returning home for the night; he had to be at the house to see the contractors in the morning.

Plenty of people, Miss Wilkinson, naturally, among them, were able to agree pretty well later on the way several things happened, and as to what various people among those concerned did. Particularly was there agreement as to certain statements of time, and, in view of the sequel, that is important.

After dinner, practically every one at the inn sat about in the hall, which was also the lobby. The desk was there, and there were two open fires and a number of comfortable chairs and sofas. Mrs. Verplank sat near one of the fires, and Burke was with her for some time. Verplank went upstairs about half-past eight. He came down soon after nine—not more than five minutes past the hour. He carried a bag, but was not dressed to go out—that is, had neither hat nor overcoat.

Burke left Mrs. Verplank just then, wandered down to the billiard-room and began playing pool with a man named Brett. Verplank stopped at the desk and asked to have his runabout brought round from the garage, explaining that he was going over to East Milton to spend the night. Mrs. Verplank got up and crossed to the desk while her husband was still there, and asked that no mistake be made about calling her at seven the next morning.

Then she turned to her husband. Several people heard what she said.

"I'm very tired, Jack. I think I'll go on up and go to bed."

They also heard his reply, which was certainly, it seemed, harsh.

"You can't expect to dance all night every night and not be tired."

She winced, but said nothing and turned toward the stairs. He followed her, looking a little shamefaced, Miss Wilkinson thought, and they disappeared together. That was at a quarter past nine. Verplank came down a few minutes later. He was ready for the road now, clad in a fur coat and a cap, and was pulling on his driving-gloves as he came down the stairs. He stopped at the desk to repeat his wife's injunction that no mistake be made about calling her in the morning and went out. Then the engine of his car sounded, and he went off.

Burke finished playing pool about ten o'clock and returned to the lobby. He looked about, and Miss Wilkinson was only one of several people who drew the inference that he was looking for Mrs. Verplank. He went outside for a minute; when he came in he yawned, and announced, rather gratuitously, Miss Wilkinson thought, that he was tired and was going to bed. Then he, too, went up-stairs. Had he glanced round, he would have seen several people looking first at the office clock and then at one another in a significant way. It was just ten minutes past ten.

AT FIFTEEN minutes after eleven o'clock the thing happened. All the witnesses were agreed as to that. At least, they were all agreed that it was well after eleven, and not yet at the half-hour. Most of the guests had gone to bed. The front door had been locked, and the night clerk had curled up on a settee to get a little sleep. One or two guests had lights in their rooms and were perhaps reading in bed. But no one was stirring.

And at almost precisely a quarter after eleven (as has been said, there was very little doubt about the time) the silence was broken by a ghastly scream, or series of screams. Miss Wilkinson described them as "blood-curdling shrieks."

But that was by no means all. Indeed, it was only the beginning. The shrieks were followed by voices—or, rather, there were voices in the midst of which shrieks were interspersed. Every one in the hotel—or nearly every one—heard them; but no two were agreed as to exactly what the voices said. Miss Wilkinson's version (which was perhaps as near to authenticity as any other, inasmuch as she was actually in the hall and, indeed, just outside the door of the room from which the voices came within five seconds—at her own estimate—of the first alarm) was something like this:

"Oh, no!" (Shriek.) "No! In God's name, Archie—no!" (Shriek.) "Oh, Archie! Archie!"

All this, and more shrieks in a woman's voice. Then, more or less interspersed with that voice, a heavy voice, undoubtedly a man's, saying things only partly understood, mostly a jumble of half-articulate oaths, but in an interval, when the other voice was silent, at least one phrase, of which Miss Wilkinson was sure: "Be quiet—damn you! Be quiet!"

Then the woman's shriek again, but this time only a sort of half-shriek, ending in a kind of gurgle and then stopping abruptly. Any one could tell what that meant; and if there had been any doubt about it, the marks on the poor woman's throat when they got into the room and found her gave ghastly confirmation.

As to just how soon they did get into the room there was again a good deal of discrepancy. Miss Wilkinson said that she had pounded on the door even while the turmoil of voices continued, and screamed at the top of her own voice; but her testimony as to this cannot be regarded as altogether reliable, because there was the testimony of others—Mrs. Brett, and a Miss Murray, in particular, who came from across the hall certainly not many seconds later—that Miss Wilkinson had collapsed and was lying in a faint on the hall floor. She was directly in front of the room, however, and so, to an extent, her story about pounding on the door was substantiated.

The fact that Miss Wilkinson had fainted was doubtless unfortunate from several points of view. Notably it led to a misconception on the part of Mrs. Brett and Miss Murray and sundry other guests who arrived not much later as to the source of the outcry that all had heard. The not unnatural supposition was entertained that

Miss Wilkinson herself had either been attacked or had perhaps experienced a nightmare. She was carried into her room, two doors along the hall, by willing hands, and possibly two or three minutes elapsed before she revived sufficiently to expostulate with the friends who were applying smelling-salts and sprinkling her face with water.

Then she gave most emphatic assurance that she was quite all right and that the trouble was in room number nineteen. She herself led the way to the door of that room and more or less coherently repeated what she had heard.

Two or three people rapped violently on the door and demanded to know if anything was wrong. When no answer came back, every one was well aware that something was decidedly wrong.

Without further ceremony, efforts were made to open the door. But it was locked, and there was no transom.

"Break in the door!" two or three voices suggested in chorus, and one of the men (of the three—or perhaps four—who had appeared) waved the women aside and was preparing to put his shoulder against the door when Mrs. Maloney, the hotel proprietress, called out to him to wait a minute; she had thought of something.

Her thought was simple enough, yet it is testimony to her quickness of wit that it had come to her under those very exciting conditions. She had remembered that there was a little balcony at the rear of the house which enabled guests, if so inclined, to get the air and see the scenery, and made it possible to pass from one room to another. The balcony extended only across rooms nineteen and twenty. The specific thought that had come to Mrs. Maloney was that if they were to go into room twenty they could pass along the balcony and enter room nineteen through the window—if the window chanced to be open.

As has been suggested, it would perhaps be impossible to say just how many minutes had elapsed while these various maneuvers and recollections were developing. The point is by no means unimportant in the sequel; for all witnesses are agreed as to the next development—the fact, namely, that when they turned to the door of room twenty, they found its door also locked.

The fact that every other door along the entire hall was now open, and practically every guest in the hotel congregated in the hall, arrayed in all manner of makeshift apparel, made the exception notable.

"Is there any one in this room?" asked Mr. Brett—or some one else.

"Yes—certainly—the room is occupied," gasped Mrs. Maloney.

Mr. Brett—or some one else—pounded vigorously on the door and called out something or other vehemently.

And at that moment the door was opened, not fully but on just a crack, and a man's voice demanded,

"What on earth is wanted?"

It was not long before he found out.

Mr. Burke, for it was, of course, his room, made way, more or less involuntarily, for his group of impromptu guests, and followed in their midst, or in their wake, mumbling questions and expostulations (according to the testimony of several subsequent witnesses) as they went through his window and out on the little porch.

WHAT Burke did and said became a matter of salient interest a little later, for reasons that have perhaps already suggested themselves to the astute reader. At the moment, however, no one paid any particular attention to him, all thoughts being centered on the window of room nineteen.

Arrived at that window, however, the invading company suddenly halted, as by common impulse. The window was, in effect, a glass double door, extending to the floor, and permitting easy entrance or exit. And now that they came to this window, they said that it was open.

Notwithstanding the precipitate way in which they had come there, everybody hesitated. Not for long, to be sure, but long enough to give occasion for a remark by Miss Wilkinson (from somewhat toward the rear of the assembly), the general purport of which was: were they afraid to go on, or would they stand by and let a woman be murdered?

Whether or not the remark stimulated the courage of the invaders, they did not hesitate long; and certainly not many moments elapsed before some one had found the electric-light switch in number nineteen, making things visible; and the entire group of Chipmunk Inn guests in motley array stood pale and gasping in the presence of the gruesome thing they had come to see.

It is not necessary here to describe that spectacle in detail. Stretched across the bed at the far corner of the room lay the body of a young woman, the face beautiful, even in its ghastliness, with arms thrown out and an appearance of relaxation that could have but one meaning. And even if otherwise there could have been a conceivable doubt in the mind of any witness, doubt was dispelled by observation of *something* on which, probably, every eye focused—the handle of a dagger projecting from the bosom of the motionless figure.

IT WOULD be futile to attempt to chronicle in anything like true sequence the events of the ensuing hour or so at Chipmunk Inn.

Time moved on before it proved possible to locate the coroner, Dr. Jason. Other representatives of the law, in the person of the constable and the sheriff, came on the scene almost simultaneously with the coroner himself.

There was substantial unanimity of testimony later that the time of arrival of the coroner—prior to which nothing of consequence was done—was almost precisely at two o'clock. Dr. Jason himself recorded that he had returned from a call on a patient in the country at just ten minutes before two, and that, finding the message, he had come at once to the inn.

When the coroner appeared, there were perhaps twenty persons eager to tell him all they knew—with indefinite additions and embellishments. But he lost little time listening to these turbulent recitals. Without manifesting unbecoming haste, he went expeditiously up the stairs and entered room nineteen through the door, which was now unlocked, the key having been found on the inside, as a key ordinarily would be.

Dr. Jason is a man of about forty-five, and therefore not lacking in experience. He is a rather portly individual, with the high color of the good liver and the smiling countenance of the good fellow. The office of coroner being elective, it is likely to be held by one who is a pretty good sort of chap and amply qualified as a "hand-shaker." Corresponding scientific qualifications may or may not be in evidence. In the present instance— But we may as well let events speak for themselves.

Dr. Jason walked slowly to the bureau on the opposite side of the room from the bed and placed thereon a bag that he carried. He removed his coat with rather ostentatious leisureliness and laid it over the back of a chair. The hat which hitherto had remained on his head was now removed and laid on the bureau beside the bag. Then the official, his face now wearing an aspect of serene gravity in keeping with the importance of the function, approached the bed and, leaning over, put his finger on the dead woman's pulse. This, of course, was a mere matter of habit. The same might be said of the ensuing examination with stethoscope and palpation of the eyeballs. In effect, the physician was marking time while he was sizing up the situation.

Other investigators, however, constable and sheriff among them, were at work. To connect the cries of "Archie! Archie!" that the dead woman had uttered with Burke, the occupant of the next room, was an obvious procedure. Volunteer witnesses told of Verplank's jealousy. The story seemed only too plain—a lover's quarrel and then——

Nor was even that all the evidence. Burke had gone up-stairs soon after Verplank's departure. And his vehement denial of the implication piling up against him, of course, was a matter of neither official nor unofficial significance. And for that the local officials could certainly not be blamed, particularly when two further items of evidence are recorded:

Item one: The coroner discovered that the handle of the steel paper-knife which had been used as the murder-weapon bore on its polished end the plainly marked initials "A. B."

Item two: The coroner and his associates were in the midst of their questioning when word came over the telephone that Mrs. Maloney, proprietress of Chipmunk Inn, had found a diamond breastpin, which the hotel clerk recognized as having been worn by Mrs. Verplank when she came to the hotel, concealed in the folds of a piece of wearing-apparel in a drawer of the bureau in room twenty, said drawer containing several other garments obviously belonging to Burke.

"I guess you couldn't get a much plainer case than that," commented the constable, after this clinching bit of testimony.

And sheriff and coroner agreed that they guessed you couldn't.

WHILE the official investigation was thus going forward with results so satisfactory, excitement at the seat of the tragedy did not abate.

To begin with, Mr. Verplank had been summoned by telephone, and, as a matter of course, had come from his country place with all speed. No one had thought to summon him for perhaps half or three-quarters of an hour after the tragedy occurred, and then there had been some delay in getting him on the telephone. Then, although the distance was short, the roads are very hilly, and one cannot make very good time, so that it was nearly an hour after he had been summoned that the bereaved husband himself appeared.

At about ten minutes after two o'clock, then, almost simultaneously with the coming of the coroner and his associates, Mr. Verplank had appeared. Evidence of his grief was obvious enough in his appearance and manner; yet he exhibited self-restraint, and, after the first outburst, when he viewed the body of his wife, he managed to control his feelings sufficiently to listen to the voluble reports of many witnesses.

The recitals did not vary substantially from what has already been set down in the present narrative. There were conflicting details, as a matter of course, and there was the usual tendency to elaborate and introduce new incidents of minor importance—partly, perhaps, in proof of the imaginative qualities of mind of some of the reciters, and partly because memory does pick up new threads of association and finally bring back to us observations that at first were lost in the rush of major emotions.

In addition to the rehearsal of observations relative to the pathetic incidents of the actual murder, however, there was testimony as to some earlier occurrences which was not without significance.

Particularly is this true when it is recalled that there were among the guests a good many who were strongly disposed to advance and cling to the hypothesis of suicide. That view could hardly be entertained by any one who had heard the outcry clearly enough to recognize the two voices, one of them unmistakably masculine. But, of course, not all of the guests had been near enough or wide awake enough to make out anything beyond inarticulate screams, more piercing than the actual words uttered.

Such persons—or some of them—thought that the woman might have screamed out even as she drove the dagger into her own breast, or immediately thereafter.

But, quite aside from the matter of voices at the time of the murder, there was evidence (not to mention the marks on the victim's neck) that strongly tended to disprove the theory of suicide in the fact that no fewer than five or six of the guests recalled, as soon as the acuteness of excitement had subsided, that they had heard Mrs. Verplank singing, and even whistling, apparently in the happiest vein, not more than half an hour—perhaps less than that—before the shocking outcry that marked the tragic dénouement.

"I was going along the hall at just about half-past ten," Miss Wilkinson asserted, "and I heard her singing."

"Do you remember what the song was?" some one asked.

"Perfectly," Miss Wilkinson responded. "It was——"

"I heard it, too," cut in Mrs. Smith, "and it was that song about the rose that everybody has been singing. It goes like this—" Mrs. Smith hummed the tune. "Wasn't it that, Miss Wilkinson?"

Miss Wilkinson nodded emphatically, and just then a little thin-faced old lady spoke up.

"And that isn't all," she declared. "I heard her singing, and I heard her whistling, too. I don't know just what the tune was, but it was a lively one, and I remember that I said to myself, 'When I was young, they used to tell us that whistling girls and crowing hens—' " She broke off, in recognition, probably, of the impropriety of finishing the familiar quotation in the presence of the bereft hsuband. But she could not refrain from adding: "I thought of that the first thing when we—when we found out what had happened. Not that I am superstitious or anything like that."

It seemed amply proved, then, that the young woman who was destined so soon to meet a tragic fate had been in the best of spirits up to within a short time before she had become the assassin's victim.

Her husband, moreover, had his own explanation.

"You have the guilty man," he said. "There can be no doubt of that."

"Can you—" Jason hesitated. "I dislike to ask this—but can you suggest a motive, Mr. Verplank?"

"I fear that I can," said Verplank. "I—you may imagine how distasteful it is for me to say this—but the ends of justice—I have been obliged more than once to chide Mrs. Verplank for her indiscreet acceptance of Burke's attentions." He drew himself up and looked about angrily. "Understand me—she was never anything but indiscreet. But this scoundrel knew that I was to be away. He presumed upon her folly in accepting attentions she regarded as meaningless—he availed himself of the opportunity my absence gave him to enter her room—and she died in defending herself—" Then his voice broke, and he was silent.

"I understand—I appreciate your feelings, and thank you for speaking out," said the coroner. "We shall all try to make this painful business as easy for you as possible, Mr. Verplank."

Verplank made an effort and pulled himself together.

"I am sure of that," he said. "I wonder—Mrs. Verplank had planned to take certain things to the city to-morrow. Her bags were packed for the journey. I assume that, in general, nothing may be disturbed in the room. But if you could stretch a point and allow me to take those bags— I know that she wished to have these things reach some relatives—and it would please me to be able to carry out what must have been one of her last wishes——"

"I think that may be arranged," said Jason sympathetically. "I remember seeing two bags, locked and strapped. This case is, of course, so simple—the evidence is so conclusive——"

Time was passing. There was no thought of sleep for any one in the inn that night. Archie Burke was taken to the nearest town to be placed in a cell; Jason set the inquest for noon.

"There are people—relatives—I should see myself—I do not want them to have the shock of seeing this frightful news in the papers," said Verplank. "I don't know—I may go up on a milk-train and come back later—I can be in time."

"Easily," Jason agreed. It was evident that Verplank was near the breaking-point, and small wonder.

One of the inn servants walked to the station with Verplank, carrying the bags. The news of the tragedy had spread, and the station-agent was at his post.

"Might's well stay till morning now," he said. "Going up on the milk, Mr. Verplank? You don't want to lug those bags. Let me check them and send them up on nine."

"No—I'll take them—" Then Verplank hesitated a moment. "All right," he said. "That's a good idea. You'll be sure to get them off?"

"Sure!" said the agent sympathetically.

VERPLANK went off then. Archie Burke was already at Milton, five miles away, held by the coroner's order on a charge of murder in the first degree. And just about as the milk-train was pulling out, District-Attorney Brandon came up in his car. With him was another man—whose face, in New York, might well have been familiar. But it was unknown at the Chipmunk Inn, although this was Dr. Daniel Goodrich, one of New York's medical examiners—one of the officials, that is, who have succeeded the old coroners in that city.

Brandon introduced Dr. Goodrich to Dr. Jason at once.

"You know of Dr. Goodrich, of course," he said. "You must have heard of some of his astonishing successes in clearing up mysterious cases in New York."

Dr. Jason acknowledged the introduction pleasantly, but, perhaps, rather superciliously. Plainly, he was not greatly impressed. And Dr. Goodrich, famous though he might be and was, really was not impressive. Save for his extraordinarily keen gray eyes, there was about him nothing at all remarkable. His face was frank and open; its aspect was benevolent.

"I'm afraid there's nothing here to interest Dr. Goodrich," said Jason. "The case is entirely cleared up."

"I congratulate you," said Dr. Goodrich.

"Oh, it was obvious from the first," said Jason. "I suppose you'll want the facts, Brandon."

"I'd better have them," said the district attorney dryly, "as a matter of form. The law requires a trial in a murder case, you know. The murderer can't plead guilty. Do I understand that he has confessed?"

"No," Jason admitted. "But that's pure bravado. You'll have evidence enough to send a dozen men to the chair."

And he proceeded to recite all he knew of the case—all of which had already been told. Brandon nodded; Goodrich spoke most cordially.

"Admirable!" he said. "Let me congratulate you again, Doctor. I have never heard a better presentation of a case. You have everything—motive, opportunity, a seemingly complete chain of circumstantial evidence."

"Have you any questions to ask?" Brandon asked him. "You see, Doctor"—he turned to Jason—"Dr. Goodrich happened to be down for the week-end at his place near Milton, and I asked him to come over with me in case we struck a snag. I didn't know how complete your case would be."

"I am delighted," said Dr. Jason.

"There are one or two questions," said Dr. Goodrich. "Mr. Verplank left here at half-past nine? Yes. Burke went upstairs at ten minutes past ten? Yes. Mrs. Verplank was heard to sing and whistle after that, and before any sound that indicated that something was wrong? Yes. And it was at a quarter past eleven that the first scream was heard? I see. Yes. May we see the room? Nothing has been touched, of course?"

"I examined the body and withdrew the knife," said Jason, importantly. "There was no effusion of blood until I did so. And I gave Mr. Verplank permission to remove two of his wife's bags—they could have no bearing on the case, of course."

Dr. Goodrich nodded. He made a careful examination of the body and of the room, and went out on the balcony then, and, followed by Jason, into Burke's room.

"Your friend is wasting a lot of time," said Dr. Jason to Brandon. "All this ground has been covered."

Brandon smiled and nodded. It was not Dr. Goodrich's way to waste time, and Brandon knew it.

"There is nothing more for us to do here," said Goodrich, after a short time. "Brandon—you'll drive me home?"

"Of course," said the district attorney. And, when they were in his car: "You agree with Jason, of course? It is an open-and-shut case?"

"Perhaps," said Goodrich. "I want to send some telegrams. Let's stop at the station. The operator ought to be on duty there."

At the station, Goodrich sent off three rather long telegrams, written in code, to the operator's disappointment.

"Verplank checked those suitcases or bags," said Goodrich. "Jason may be right in thinking they can have no bearing—but you might get them just the same. Your power is ample, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes," said Brandon. "We can take them along and return them to Mr. Verplank later in the day."

"We might as well let them go on a later train," said Goodrich. "A slight annoyance might easily prove most upsetting to a man who has suffered such a shock."

"Right! It's a small matter," said Brandon. "If Mr. Verplank inquires about the bags, say they've gone," he told the agent. "Any delay can be attributed to the other end of the line."

He then drove Dr. Goodrich to his house.

"Too bad to rout you out," he said. "I hoped the case would be interesting."

"It is," said Goodrich. "As interesting as any I have seen for a long time."

Brandon stared.

"You're not growing morbid, are you?" he asked. "Getting to be interested in murder just as murder?"

"I think not," said Goodrich evenly. "I'm going to make up some of my lost sleep. Good-night. I'll see you at Jason's inquest. By the way, you might use your influence to induce him to grant any request I make—no matter how foolish he may think it."

"I'll do that," said the puzzled prosecutor. "But I'll be hanged if I see what you're driving at!"

THE foregoing narrative gives a pretty clear idea of the developments of this case so far as they were known to the guests at Chipmunk Inn or to constable and sheriff—to say nothing of the general public—at the time when the coroner's inquest was held in a private room adjoining the district attorney's office the following day.

The room was about thirty feet across, almost square, with windows on one side only, a door in each of the adjoining walls and a blank wall opposite the windows.

Close to one of the walls was a table behind which sat the coroner, Dr. Jason, with a stenographer. Seated with his back to the wall, the windows were on his right. Across the room, occupying about half of it and facing the coroner's table, were benches on which were seated fifteen or twenty more or less interested spectators, a number of them prospective witnesses. A few feet in front of the coroner's table, but a little to the left of one seated in the middle of the room and facing the coroner, was the table at which sat the district attorney, with Dr. Goodrich on his left. The two had their backs to the windows, and at their left, over toward the corner, was the murder suspect, Archibald Burke, sitting very erect and staring straight ahead, with the constable and sheriff in armchairs at either side of him. To the right of the district attorney and a little in front of him sat Mr. Verplank.

The witness-chair had been placed in the space on the coroner's left, so that its occupant would face the spectators. It was almost within arm's reach of the coroner and only a few feet from the district attorney's table. In the corner of the room beyond the witness-chair and at the coroner's left stood a small table on which was a mass of blue cloth and white drapery, the apparel worn by the murdered woman. There was also the medium-sized suitcase which had been brought to the inn by Mr. Verplank—doubtless containing such of the dead woman's clothes as she had intended taking with her to New York.

These gruesome exhibits, lying on the table, were at least fifteen feet removed from any individual in the room. No one came nearer to them, much less touched them, while the events were occurring that are about to be recorded.

WE MAY pass very briefly over the testimony of the first witnesses, inasmuch as what they revealed is already known to us. Only two or three points of significance may be reiterated and a few other items of new evidence related.

When Mr. John Verplank was on the witness-stand, the fact was brought out that he had motored directly back to his country place after leaving his wife at Chipmunk Inn. The distance, over the winding and hilly roads, was about eleven miles.

He had reached home shortly after ten o'clock, and retired soon after. Having been roused by the telephone-bell and told of the dreadful thing that had happened, he had glanced at his watch and noted that it was exactly thirteen minutes to one. He had jumped into his clothes, summoned his man to help him get out the car, and had driven at full speed to the scene of the tragedy, arriving soon after two o'clock.

The only other item of special importance brought out by Mr. Verplank's testimony concerned the suitcase, presumably containing his wife's apparel, which had been with her at the inn and which he had taken away—with the coroner's permission—with another bag. It appeared that Mr. Verplank had taken the suitcase to the railway station and checked it to New York.

He had given no thought to the matter afterward, and he hardly remembered what he had done, being, not unnaturally, in a more or less dazed condition.

It is worth mentioning that the circumstances referring to the checking of the suitcase were brought out by questions of the district attorney.

The testimony of Mr. Verplank and the testimony of several guests at the inn who had participated in the discovery of the murder, though certainly not without importance, might be said to represent preliminary formalities.

The real interest centered on the testimony of the murder suspect himself, who was presently called to the witness-stand.

Different observers were not at all agreed afterward as to the kind of showing Burke made. Whispering among themselves as the suspect took the chair, some members of the audience expressed the opinion that virtual ackhowledgment of his guilt was written in every line of his face, while others declared that he was carrying himself with bold effrontery, which, however, might be taken as equally damaging evidence against him.

Appearances aside, his story was coherent enough. He emphatically denied all knowledge of the crime. He had never, he insisted, paid more than ordinary attentions required by courtesy to Mrs. Verplank. Her husband's jealousy, of which he frankly said he had been well aware, had been groundless and insulting.

How did he account for his slowness in opening his door?

He had been sound asleep, and heard

nothing until the pounding on his door roused him. Then he had jumped out of bed and, as soon as he could get his bearings, had opened the door, utterly bewildered as to what was the meaning of the strange invasion.

Equally emphatic was his denial of all knowledge as to how the incriminating breastpin had come to be hidden in the midst of his apparel in the bureau drawer. It appeared, indeed, that this exceedingly damaging piece of evidence had not been brought to his attention till now. Apparently the coroner and his fellow officials had, for some reason, thought best to keep back this culminating bit of evidence. The effect of its presentation now was obvious enough. It was nothing less than stunning.

And the climax was reached when the blood-stained steel paper-knife with the horn handle was held up before the witness.

Whether Burke's response—blanched face, staring eyes, stammering speech — represented the outward manifestation of a guilty conscience or merely the amazed bewilderment of an innocent man accused and feeling himself utterly helpless, only a psychologist could have told. And doubtless a group of psychologists, had such been present, would have been of divided opinion in their estimate of this matter, as not infrequently happens in similar cases.

There was one trained practical psychologist present, however—namely, Dr. Daniel Goodrich—who probably had a rather definite opinion as to whether or not the witness was telling the truth; but it would have been a penetrating mind indeed that could have judged from observation of the medical examiner's immobile face as to what that opinion might be.

THERE was doubtless very little question as to the status of the case, in the opinion of the coroner himself, at the close of Burke's testimony.

As he saw it—and indeed as it would have seemed to most unprejudiced auditors—evidence so damaging as to be apparently unanswerable had been presented showing that Burke had committed the murder. In point of fact, no alternative hypothesis seemed available. The initialed murder-weapon, the closed door of room twenty (for two or three minutes after all the other doors were open—just about time enough to hide a breastpin and wash one's hands)—these inanimate witnesses seemed to cry out against Archibald Burke as loudly as the victim herself had cried out in the midst of the murderous assault.

The fact that the accused man denied everything, taken by itself, would be appraised by any criminologist as having no significance whatsoever. A voice not unlike Mr. Burke's had been heard in angry retort in room nineteen at the moment of the murder. The words that Miss Wilkinson and others had then heard would amply serve, even if there were no other evidence, to drown out the words of the suspect's present denial.

Thus the matter stood when the accused man had been excused—or ordered—from the witness-chair and had returned to his place between the officers of the law. Doubtless it was nothing more than a mere formality when Dr. Jason glanced about the room and inquired casually,

"Is there any one else here who can throw any further light on this case, or who wishes to testify in connection with it?"

To the utter amazement of the coroner himself, and doubtless to the amazement of nearly every one in the room, a voice—slightly muffled, but clearly audible—responded. The voice seemed to come from nowhere in particular—or, at least, from no part of the room where any person sat—and the words that were uttered were as mysterious and startling as the doubtful origin of the voice itself.

"I am not present in the sense in which you are present," the voice said; "but I do wish to testify. I can throw much light on this case."

As the voice became audible, the coroner raised his head suddenly, then turned in his chair. Before the words were finished, he was on his feet. It would be useless to attempt to describe the expression of his face. But the words that he now gasped out served to indicate the character of his reaction to the seemingly disembodied sound.

"In the name of God, who and what and where are you?" he gasped.

The district attorney was on his feet.

"If it please the court," he said, "I would suggest that my friend Dr. Goodrich, here"— indicating with a gesture—"be permitted to conduct the examination of this new witness. He, I think, is in touch with her in a way that the rest of us are not, and she will, I believe, respond to his questionings in a way that will be illuminative."

THE coroner had settled back into his chair. He had turned staring eyes on the district attorney, then glanced here and there about the room, almost apprehensively. Finally his eyes came back to the speaker, and then shifted a little till they focused rather vacantly on Goodrich's face. The physician sat absolutely immobile, his eyes fixed on the desk before him.

The coroner drew a deep breath or two before he answered,

"Dr. Goodrich has full authorization to proceed."

There was tense, almost awesome silence in the court-room. Presently, the clear, even-toned voice of Dr. Goodrich broke it. Apparently addressing the unseen witness, but without changing his position, he said:

"You have told us that you are not present in the flesh, as other witnesses are present. Is it not possible for you to make yourself visible to us?"

The same not unpleasing but slightly muffled voice—unmistakably the voice of a woman—that had startled the auditors before was again heard, seeming, as before, to come from nowhere in particular, or perhaps from the vacant corner of the room, where the table stood with its exhibits of the wearing-apparel and suitcase.

"I cannot make myself visible, but I can make my voice audible. I am fully aware of who you are and what is the meaning of this gathering and why I am summoned; just as I am fully aware of everything that took place in room nineteen at the inn."

Again Dr. Goodrich spoke.

"And you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"It is hardly likely," the voice responded, "that I should do otherwise."

Goodrich nodded his head slowly, as if in recognition of the import of this declaration. It was the first movement he had made, and now again he was statuelike as he intoned,

"You know what took place in room nineteen of the Chipmunk Inn?"

"I do."

"A murder was committed?"

"Yes."

"Will you describe it?"

"The victim was attacked as she stood by the bed. She was choked to death."

"Did she struggle or cry out?"

"No."

A deep-toned murmur of amazement and dissent ran through the room. Dr. Jason rapped sharply for silence.

"Why did she not defend herself?"

"She was taken by surprise."

"She had no reason, then, to anticipate such treatment from her assailant?"

"She had the strongest possible reason for not anticipating anything of the sort."

"Will you describe the movements of the murderer after the attack?"

"He went out on the balcony and into the adjoining room, number twenty. He returned with a steel paper-knife with a horn handle, and stabbed his victim with it. He then went again to room twenty, went into the bathroom and washed his hands."

A groan was heard. Burke was leaning forward, deathly white. All eyes were fixed upon him. But Goodrich spoke again.

"At what time did the murder occur?"

"At twenty minutes past nine o'clock."

There was a gasp that must have come simultaneously from every one in the room, and then, again, that incredulous, dissenting murmur. Voices detached themselves from the hum.

"No! No! I heard her singing after ten o'clock!" "It wasn't until after eleven—and she did scream—I heard her!" "So did I."

Once more Jason rapped for silence. And Goodrich's voice, as calm, as unemotional as ever, went on,

"Did the victim at any time last night sing or whistle?"

"No."

"Did she scream and cry out, as other witnesses have sworn they heard her do?"

"No."

"Do you mean that the witnesses were not telling the truth?"

"No."

"Will you say who committed this murder?"

"I will."

"O God!"

A wild shriek rang out. John Verplank had leaped to his feet. He was clutching at his throat.

"Helen—be still—I can't stand it! I confess—I did it—I killed you—I will tell everything!"

Brandon and Goodrich were at his side in a moment, supporting him.

"God!" he cried again and again. "God! It's too much! I'll tell—take my statement——"

Incoherently, and yet with a wealth of detail that forbade all doubt, he poured out the sordid story of his crime—long planned and carefully worked out. He had made much of Burke's attentions to establish a motive by the man he planned to incriminate. His own wealth was a sham. Great as his income had been, his speculative losses had been greater still. He had taken and lost his wife's money and that of clients. Exposure had been imminent; his wife's trip to New York would have brought it about. Relations between them had been strained; he had reason to believe that the discovery of his defalcation would precipitate a crisis. Her death would make him her sole heir under a will made some time before.

"But—" Jason's voice was hysterical; he voiced the question that was on every tongue. "How—her screams—her voice, singing—*after her death*——"

Verplank stared at him, pitched forward then in a faint.

THE turbulence of the ensuing minutes may be imagined. But after a little time order was restored, and the coroner, recalling his authority and the circumstances of the strange situation, rapped on the table and demanded order. He was sitting back in his chair now, wearing the aspect of one who is bewildered, not to say distraught. It was with seeming effort that he found his tongue to say:

"Dr. Goodrich, I have no mortal notion as to how you have done this amazing thing, but I want to say that I never saw the like of it, and I guess no one else ever saw the like of it. Would you mind telling us how you did it?"

The physician addressed had risen to his feet. His face was serenely grave as he stepped forward and stood beside the table and lightly clasped the handle of the suitcase. Turning, so that he faced the coroner and at the same time practically the entire audience, he said quietly:

"I will very gladly explain. It is in a sense simple, yet it could not have been done without the aid of one of the most wonderful developments of modern science. The suitcase you see here is really filled, not with the apparel of the dead woman, as has been supposed, but with the receiving apparatus of a wireless telephone. There is nothing wonderful about this, as wireless telephones go, except its extraordinary compactness. The first one of its kind was made by a government official in Washington. Mr. Verplank, himself an expert amateur wireless operator, had heard of the idea and duplicated it, and put it to a nefarious use."

The narrator was tapping on the side of the bag as he held it forward for inspection. He manipulated the lock, opened the bag, and revealed the coiled wires, amplification-tubes and megaphone-like trumpet.

"This suitcase," Goodrich explained, "was substituted for, another one that looked just like it, which, in reality, contained Mrs. Verplank's apparel. Doubtless the woman herself supposed that the case was hers, but in reality, for his own purposes, her husband brought this one; and the reason he brought it, as you will readily understand now, was that he intended to use it at a later hour—as he did use it—to transmit sounds, including the imitated voice of his dead wife and his own masked voice in response, that would furnish apparent evidence that a murder was being done in room nineteen two hours or so after the actual murder had been accomplished."

A momentary pause; then, by way of further explanation:

"The name 'Archie' was used to cast suspicion on Burke. It was a diabolical project."

The coroner was scratching his head, and his expression of astonishment had by no means altogether subsided but was in part replaced by a look of growing comprehension.

"I begin to understand," he said presently. "It was one of the slickest tricks, as well as one of the most diabolical, that any man ever attempted, and it certainly came very near to working. But just one other thing: Precisely how have you used this talking suitcase here to-day? Who furnished the talk and plainly answered your questions?"

The physician was smiling.

"An assistant of mine, Miss Mazie Marshall, by name," he answered. "She was talking into a transmitting wireless telephone in the room of a young friend of mine, Jack Henly, who happened to be listening last night and who overheard the sounds that the assassin made at eleven-twenty, and also the singing and whistling transmitted from phonograph records a little earlier. But for this fortunate eavesdropping, perhaps the truth would never have been known. Young Henly sent word to me of what he had heard. The boy's evidence included a test as to the direction from which the sound had come, and served to locate the sending station.

"The case, from our standpoint, was cleared up unequivocally. It remained only to make a demonstration that would convince you"—addressing the coroner—"and perhaps, so we thought, lead the criminal to confess. That was done here to-day with the aid of a very sensitive dictagraph, the receiving part of which, as some of you may have noticed, or as you all may notice now, stood in front of me on the table as I sat talking. Everything that I said was heard over the telephone wire by Mazie Marshall, in Jack Henly's wireless transmitting-room, half a dozen blocks away. She responded, and the wireless messages were taken up by the apparatus in this suitcase, and the voice came to all your ears, with the result you have seen."

Full comprehension had overspread the face of the coroner. A drawn sort of smile lurked about his rotund features.

"All of which certainly beats the Dutch," he commented presently. "More than that, it beat a whole bunch of Connecticut Yankees, which is even nearer the limit," he added, as he came forward to shake the medical examiner's hand.

A moment later the coroner seemed to recall that his official work was not quite completed, for he came back to the table and called out to the stenographer:

"We find that Mr. Archibald Burke is innocent, and he is hereby discharged. Our official verdict is that Mrs. Verplank met death at the hands of her husband, John Verplank, who has been taken into custody and will be held for trial by due process of law." Another pause, then: "Also that the official thanks of Fairfield County are due to Dr. Daniel Goodrich for clearing up the most curious murder case that ever got itself staged in this neck of the woods—or I guess any other. This inquest is adjourned *sine die.*"

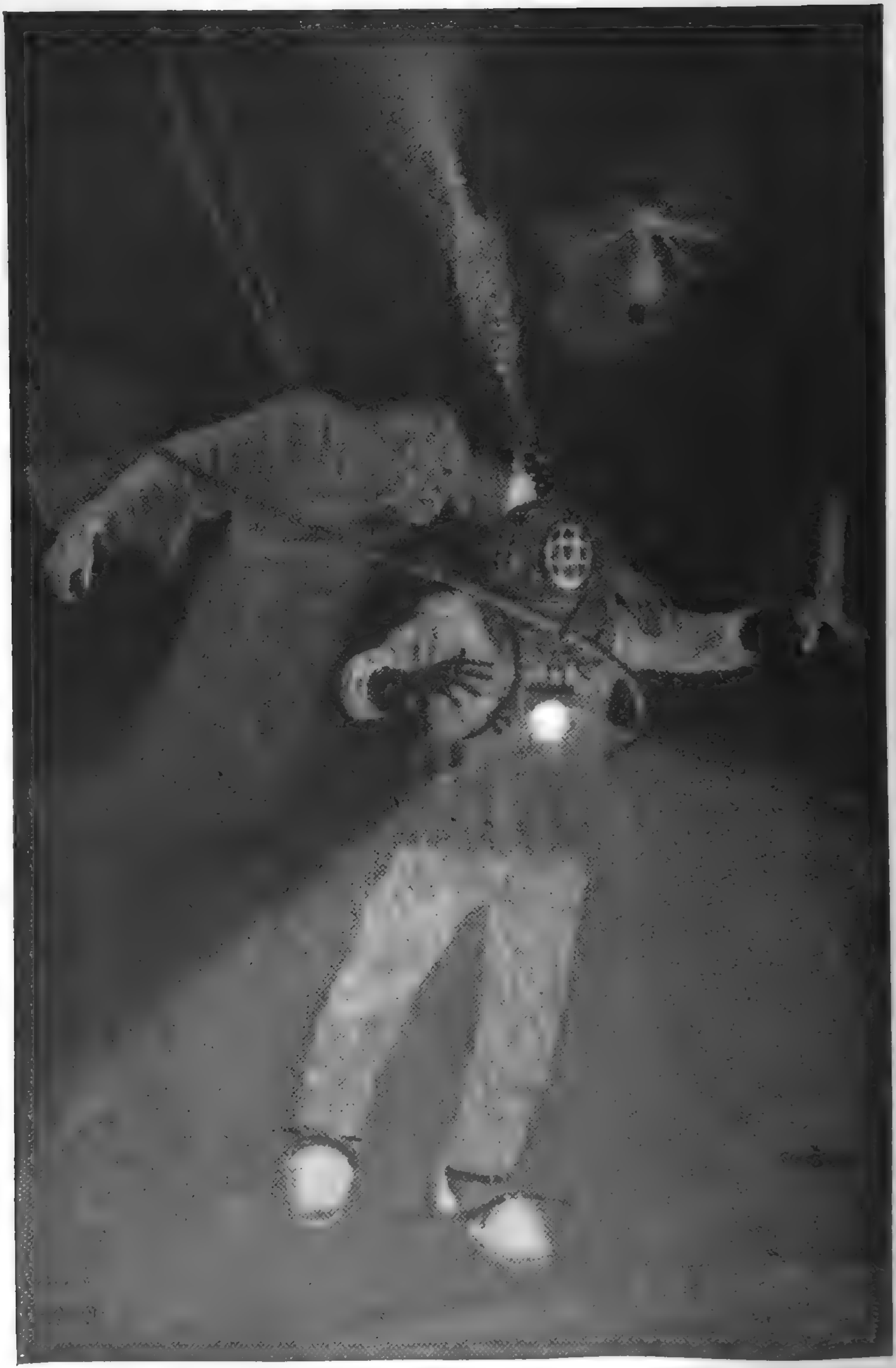
The next Dr. Goodrich story will be a novelette of thrilling interest, "The Locked Room." It will appear in July EVERYBODY'S.

Of This Age Weary

By Miriam Crittenden Carman

A LITTLE space of silence—I would fain
Cease this dull tapping on the wintry pane
Of Fame's cracked, tipsy glass,
And get me to some place of gentle grass,
Where all the sight and sound will be the swift
And sudden shadow of wings falling through the sun,
One after beating one.

O gods! Of this age weary, baffled, I
Would lift the helmet of my heart, and lie
Revealed upon some splendid, sea-clad shore,
Dream-deep in solitude, and hear once more
Pan pipe the gilded day, while breathless, sweet,
Shy nymphic thoughts steal back that once were mine,
Through bayberry and pine.



Thorne's blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Something had touched him on the shoulder!

The Acid Test

One Cannot Pioneer Without Meeting Hard Knocks and Hard "Nuts"—if We May Be Pardoned for Using the Word. You'll Learn This and More by Reading This Grim Tragedy of the North

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Illustration by Colcord Heurlin

SAVE for a few scattered lights, the outline of the *Aleutian Isle* would have merged into the black night through which she steamed. On the bridge, the officer on watch shivered in his heavy overcoat. It was late autumn, and already the chill of winter held Alaskan waters in its relentless grip. There was a light wind, but it was the breath of the sunless Arctic and penetrated to the very marrow. On both sides of the narrow channel bleak mountains shot skyward. By day, these were beautiful, green with spruce and vegetation, tipped with snow; by night, dark, unfriendly—a menace.

The pilot snapped out an order but continued to gaze steadily into the night. Aft, the steering engine rattled in response to the wheelman. Again came the sharp order, followed by the rumble of the steering engine. The officer in the heavy overcoat peered into the darkness, then seemed to shrink into his coat and swore roundly. And then——

Without warning, the vessel crashed—at first a shock that knocked the officers from their feet and sent the quartermaster against the wheel with a sickening grunt. From below came the shuddering and grinding of anguish as the sharp reef tore through the steel hull. Higher and higher the ship mounted until her crumpled, dripping bows cleared the black waters. For a full ten seconds she paused, a trembling thing of steel; then from below again came the crash and grind as steel plates were ripped asunder like sheets of tin. Slowly she began sliding from the reef. An inch, then two, then a lunge of fully three feet, only to pause, uncertain.

"She's slipping!" cried the quartermaster in a voice filled with horror.

Cries of terror came from many throats—such cries as come only from human beings suddenly roused from slumber to face death. Here and there, along the rows of cabins, lights blinked on. On the bridge, the captain, rugged and capable despite his silver hair, had assumed command. He was dressed in pajamas, and his right hand gripped a heavy revolver. He gave orders in a deep voice that was heard above the tumult, and they were obeyed on the run. Grimy men tumbled up from the engine- and fire-rooms and silently hurried to their stations. A white-coated steward was attempting to quiet a screaming woman, at the same time forcing her toward one of the life-boats, which were already swinging outboard. Other stewards and the cool-headed among the passengers were calming those whom panic had gripped. Half-dressed men and women rushed from their staterooms and joined the stampede for the boats. A cursing man, mad in his fright, forced a woman aside and leaped for a boat. An officer dropped him in his tracks with the butt of an automatic pistol.

Again came the shudder and crashing

as something carried away and the vessel slipped back another yard.

A half-clad man stood near an amidships life-boat. Fright had left him powerless to reason or to help himself. His wildly staring eyes never left the hungry waters that surged and eddied about the hull.

"It's dark down there!" he screamed in a voice of frenzy. "It goes round and round, and sucks things down. It'll be sucking poor struggling people down." The shuddering of the stricken vessel seemed to strike a responsive chord in the man. "I always was afraid of water," he moaned, "and now I know! Look! Look! It's pulling at our ship, pulling it down, down, down!" This last word came with a weird cry. A passing steward shook him roughly, but was not heeded. His hands tore away the shirt at his throat. "Water smothers and grips! It's relentless! Black! Dark! It is waiting for us, and we are doomed—down where it's dark, cold and slimy! O God, help us!" His fright had left him a pitiful, sobbing object. A passing seaman eyed him in disgust.

"Shut up that bawling!" he growled, then picked the man up bodily and tossed him into a boat. As if some unseen hand had manipulated the switches, the lights died out, and with them the frantic call of the radio stopped. Shouts and commands filled the darkness and merged with the groaning of the hull and the creaking of blocks as boats were lowered. Oars rattled, then splashed.

And then, as suddenly as she had struck, the ship lurched sickeningly astern. Once more her dripping bows cleared the water.

"You in the boats pull clear!" It was the voice of the captain above the uproar. Gently, then with increasing speed, the vessel was engulfed in the swirling blackness that eddied and climbed higher and higher, then hissed in triumph long after she had disappeared. A deep, sullen shock told of exploding boilers. A cry of despair rent the air—then silence.

Overloaded boats hovered about the spot, with here and there a rescue as Fate spared one even as it claimed another. Gradually the small boats drew together, as if seeking protection in their numbers, to wait—wait for the blessed light of dawn that would herald another day.

The newspapers carried the story throughout the country. They told of the captain who had followed tradition and gone down with his ship, of officers and men still missing and a number of passengers unaccounted for, of unfriendly mountains, down which the early snows were already creeping, and of tossing lifeboats upon black waters. Rescue boats, it seemed, had arrived upon the scene shortly after daybreak. The survivors, cold and miserable, many of them ill from exposure, were being rushed to the nearest port.

OTHER stories came the following day—tales of the experiences of various people. The man who was sucked beneath the water only to be hurled upward again and rescued related his sensations. Some one told the story of the strong swimmer who was lost. Others described the panic, and the coolness of the officers. Days later, the same papers carried photographs of the scene. Then, too, came many comments on the disaster. Why should one of the veteran pilots of those waters pile his ship onto a known reef on a clear night? It was a black night, it is true; yet he had put his vessel through those same waters on blacker nights, in fog and in snow-storm. Perhaps he might have answered the question; the captain, called from his berth to face wreck and disaster, might have explained, or the officer who peered into the darkness, then seemed to shrink into his greatcoat, possibly could have shed some light. But they had gone down. The wheelman, alone of those on the bridge when she struck, was spared. He knew the course given him had been correct, because he himself had stood at the wheel many a time when ships were plowing those waters, and knew them almost as well as did the officers. He swore that he kept her on the exact course. Men who knew him believed him.

For several days the papers speculated and quoted; then, after the manner of newspapers, they dropped the subject for newer copy. Where water-front men gathered, it was a topic of intense interest for many days.

One man alone gathered all available data, interviewed the wheelman, then locked himself in his room and for several solid hours concentrated his mind on an analysis of the evidence. His name was Thorne, and let it be said here and now that Thorne had proved to be a thorn in the side of many an evil-doer. He was a husky fellow, with a friendly smile that disarmed even the most suspicious—his way of winning; yet beneath the surface he was cold and calculating. He had roamed the world seeking adventures, and finding them. He knew men and had been called in to help on many a knotty problem involving them. Sometimes his methods were direct; at other times he brought unusual forces to bear, either mental or physical, upon those he was investigating. Whichever method the facts of the case seemed to justify was used, and results were almost sure forthcoming.

SEVERAL days after the *Aleutian Isle* had piled up on the rocks, he dropped into the main office of the underwriters, who, of course, would be required to pay on the basis of a total wreck. There might be some salvage, or it was within the bounds of possibility that she could be raised. But this was hardly probable, and in any event the cost would be very great.

Thorne sent in his card, and Burton himself came out to see him.

"I'm glad you dropped in, Thorne," he said. "I was about to send for you. Don't suppose you've taken any great amount of interest in the *Aleutian Isle* wreck other than as a matter of news?"

"Don't bet any money on that," replied Thorne, "unless you want to lose. I've been quiet so long that I was getting a bit rusty, and you know that'll never do. Then this wreck came along, and I read it as news. As news, it is no longer a drawing card, but I'm still interested."

"What is your theory?"

"Haven't any; but I'm convinced something was wrong. I've talked to the quartermaster on watch when she struck. The officers were right—no lack of due care or anything like that. It was a clear night; yet she struck. That looks queer to me, Burton."

"And to me, too."

"Good! Are you people considering an investigation apart from the usual one the government will make?"

"In a way, yes; and that is why I am glad you called. If you can prove the vessel was deliberately wrecked—and, mind you, I am not saying she was—it'll be worth a lot of money to you," said Burton.

"I'm not so much interested in the money as I am in solving what seems to me a mystery; so, if you'll grant me the authority, I'll proceed. But, first, I want every bit of fact and such suspicions or conclusions as you may have formed. Anything you will tell me, of course, is in confidence."

"Well, as you doubtless know, good ships may be had at the present time at mighty low figures. During the war any old tub was worth money, but now you can find fine vessels tied up in most any port. Later on, when we adjust ourselves to the new order of things, many of these will be put into service.

"The *Aleutian Isle* was owned and operated by the Pennock Navigation Company. Between the competition put up by the Canadian and American vessels on the Alaskan routes, Pennock had had to step lively to hold his own. The *Aleutian Isle*, though large, was a bit slow and lacked many of the more modern steamships' conveniences. To offset this, Pennock played up his superior table-service. The meals served on the vessel were the best that ships on that run have ever known.

"Recently he was offered a fine vessel, now on the east coast, at a very attractive figure. She was ideal for the run, fast and modern. Money is a bit tight and he couldn't swing the deal, and with vessels of all kinds tied up in port for lack of cargo, he stood a poor chance of getting rid of the old *Aleutian Isle*.

"We are hard-headed business men, Thorne, and we make it our business to know the sort of men in service aboard the vessels we underwrite. The crew of the *Aleutian Isle* was above reproach from the master down. That clears them; yet there was something wrong. Pennock may be, and probably is, honest; yet, Thorne, the man is as hard as nails, is absolutely ruthless in his dealings and doesn't know the meaning of mercy. Personally I would put nothing beyond a man of that type if he wished to accomplish a certain end. For the past two months he has been in Alaska. Nothing wrong about that. He was aboard the *Aleutian Isle* shortly before she sailed, and again there is nothing wrong about that. Also, he wired the

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east-coast people for an option three days after the *Aleutian Isle* crashed. You'll say that this was a natural enough act on the part of a man who had just lost a vessel and wished to retain a business he had developed; but—" Burton shrugged his shoulders.

"Thanks," said Thorne shortly. "Now, I understand that you are sending a diver to the wreck to recover the mail and contents of the safe, if possible. I'd appreciate it very much if you would authorize me to take charge of the party as the underwriters' representative. Pennock is still up north, and I want to size him up before he leaves. If the man is guilty, he is more likely to indicate it while near the scene of his crime than when he is some distance removed."

"Ordinarily," answered Burton, "yes; but not Pennock. His cast-iron nerve will carry him anywhere. You don't know the man."

"I hope to," said Thorne grimly. "Do I go north as your representative, or don't I?"

"You do, Thorne. I'll give the necessary orders before you can leave the building. Drop in again before you go."

PENNOCK was on the point of taking passage south by a rival line when news reached him that a diving party was on the way north. He decided to keep in touch with the situation and canceled his reservation.

The party was in charge of a rugged fellow, plainly a seafaring man, named Thorne, who was very busy the day following his arrival at the little Alaskan town. There was a scow to be chartered for the installation of their diving-gear as well as arrangements to be made for a tug to care for them while working upon the wreck; and though Thorne apparently took no notice of Pennock round the hotel, nevertheless he was constantly studying the man's character.

Pennock finally struck up an acquaintance with Thorne, but not until he believed that he had fully sized the man up. "Typical water-front handy man," was the verdict; "good at working about ships whether they are on the ways, in the water or underneath. Perhaps I can use him."

There was little about Thorne to suggest the astute detective. His eyes were keen, yet, in his present rôle, their expression was mild. He was anything but cool and reserved, Pennock decided, after introducing himself and listening to the man talk. Thorne talked too much—this was Pennock's conclusion—yet he did a little talking himself.

"The *Aleutian Isle* piling up when she did hit me pretty hard," he said one evening. "Competition is very keen, you know, and I wasn't prepared for anything of the sort. We're dickering for a vessel on the east coast, but it will be some little time before she can be brought round. I decided to hang around up here a while and hold on to the business we've enjoyed in the past. Rivals don't hesitate to knife a fellow in this game, you know."

"So I've heard," commented Thorne; "but then, Mr. Pennock, if you can get a newer, faster vessel to replace the *Aleutian Isle*, you'll really be better off than you were before. She was a bit old, sir, if I may be so bold as to say so." Thorne serenely puffed at his pipe, conscious that Pennock had eyed him a bit sharply.

"I hadn't thought of it in just that light," replied Pennock, and then a note of sorrow crept into his voice. "The *Aleutian Isle* meant more to me than just a money-making vessel. I had a deep affection for the old craft."

"But, Mr. Pennock, you must look at this in the right way. She was a noble craft, and she met a noble end and went to the bottom with colors flying, so to speak, sir. She might have ended her days in the bone-yard, which, to a boat, is like the poor-house to a human, sir—if you get what I mean."

"Yes; I understand you perfectly, Mr. Thorne," he said feelingly, while inwardly he said, "Sentimental fool!" In the school of business ethics attended by Mr. Pennock, sentiment had played small part. Its code was as unrelenting and cold as Pennock himself. The man was a worthy alumnus. Of course Pennock had never murdered a man with his own hands; yet there had been men who had taken their lives because Pennock had ruined them in business. "Weak fools that the world is better off without," was his comment.

In the days that followed, Pennock went out of his way to cultivate Thorne's confidence and was gratified to note satisfactory results. The detective formed the habit of chatting about the happenings of the day, during which he would talk with the manner of one who knew he was being favored and flattered by his auditor's deep interest.

At the end of a week, Thorne dropped a little note to Burton.

> Have become very chummy with our man. Cool cuss, who regards me in the light of a boob, which possibly I am, because, frankly, I haven't found even a loose thread to follow up, let alone a hopeful clue. Yet an undefined something about him convinces me our original theory is sound. Perhaps as our pretty little friendship progresses something will develop. Never met a cooler cuss in my life. They're hard to crack, but you can crack 'em if you hit 'em hard enough. Man goes down to wreck to-morrow. We've been held up by rotten weather so far.

They were hampered by other things than the weather. A strong tide frequently made operations impossible, even with the modern equipment they were using. Bennett, the diver, could not remain down very long at a stretch, and Smart, the man who attended him, was in no condition for subsurface work unless it were a matter of life or death. He had retired from diving a year before. As for Thorne, he was more interested in possible discoveries by Bennett or an unusual movement on the part of Pennock than in actual diving, though he had descended on many occasions in the past. Pennock's statement that he was remaining north for business reasons seemed to have foundation, for he was busy with his own affairs, and not only succeeded in holding his old shippers in line but contrived to add several new firms to his list.

IF BOTH sides were playing a game, Thorne had the advantage in that Pennock did not suspect his opponent. This advantage showed itself one day when Pennock inquired if it would be possible to salvage the vessel's compass. "I would like it for a souvenir," he added. Thorne, ever ready to take advantage of the slightest clue, hesitated some time before replying, but not, as Pennock thought, because he was considering whether it would be physically posible to salvage the instrument. He knew that it could be done.

"No," he finally replied; "I don't think we can get it. The peculiar formation of the reef, in addition to an unusually strong tide, makes it impractical, if not impossible, to enter certain parts of the vessel."

He noted the expression that passed over Pennock's face, but could not decide whether it was one of relief or disappointment.

"However," he went on, "I'll direct Bennett to have a try at the wheel-house again, though he attempted to reach it the last time he was down—thought he might find something of interest, you know. There's been so much said about the *Aleutian Isle* being deliberately wrecked that the ship's log might make interesting reading."

"Never mind, Thorne; let it go," replied Pennock carelessly. "We know there's nothing to these rumors, and naturally I wouldn't risk a diver's safety to satisfy a mere whim."

Thorne's face was still that of a genial water-front man discussing an interesting topic with an admitted superior, but inwardly he was glowing with triumph. Pennock's reply had been carelessly made, yet the other man now knew that the puzzling expression he had just noted was one of relief. There was something about or in that wheel-house that Pennock did not want investigated, and Thorne's guess was that it was the ship's log.

"I'll leave it to Bennett," replied Thorne. "If he wants to take the risk, there's no reason why you shouldn't have the compass, sir." There was a world of respect in that "sir" when Thorne saw fit to use it.

"Very well," answered Pennock, who believed he was proceeding with great caution in his questioning. But Thorne abruptly changed the subject.

Yet, two days later, when bad weather sent the crew back to town with the sodden log-book, there was nothing about the entries to rouse suspicion. Pennock examined it while Thorne's keen eyes observed him from a distance, but his manner betrayed nothing to the detective, who said to himself: "I'm barking up the wrong tree. I was sure he was involved in this, but by every sign he's not—or he's a mighty good actor."

That night Pennock informed Thorne he was leaving for Seattle on the next boat.

"My people cabled me they've secured the vessel we were dickering for," he said; "and if you'll see to it that we are notified if anything unusual develops up here, I'll clear out. And, Thorne, I've enjoyed our evenings together mightily. You've had some great experiences as a diver—they sound like fiction." He extended his hand and a moment later climbed the stairs to his room, leaving Thorne feeling rather helpless.

The latter also retired soon thereafter to resume work on his problem. "Decided to clear out just as soon as he saw there was nothing phony in the log-book, eh?" he thought. "Nothing to worry about now—got a new boat, and the future looks bright. And yet——"

At twelve o'clock that night, when he crawled into bed, he concluded his evening's work and thought with "And yet——"

BENNETT was below. The water about the scow was quiet. The masts of the wreck protruded above the surface for several feet, and from their angle it was easy to see that the reef-torn hulk rested on an even keel. Not a vessel or human habitation was in sight. The snow on the surrounding mountains was lower than upon the night when the *Aleutian Isle* crashed. Over all brooded a silence unbroken save for an occasional command aboard tender or scow and the rush of a distant waterfall that seemed to be forever playing a funeral hymn for those who slept beneath the sea.

Thorne had the telephone head-gear strapped in place. On the other end of the line, far below the surface, was Bennett. He had not spoken for several minutes, and then his voice came distinctly over the wire.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. There was a moment's pause, then, "I'm coming up."

Not until his diving-gear was completely removed did he speak; then, with a foolish grin, followed by several deep breaths of the cold, bracing air, as if glad to once more be above water, he shuddered slightly.

"Came near losing my nerve," he said, "for the first time since I've been diving, but it came so quick!" Again came the shudder. "It took me right off my feet, so to speak. Brrrrh! Seen some mighty ghastly sights in my time—bound to in the diving-game, but——"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Thorne almost impatiently.

"I don't know; but may be it was a dream after all. I'll go down again. Gimme a drink of that whisky." He gulped down a glass of rare old contraband that had found its way over from Prince Rupert and seemed to feel better. "No, Mr. Thorne; I won't tell you what it was, but it was the queerest experience of my diving. Now, it seems foolish, so much that, if I told you, you'd give me the laugh, but down there—" Again he shuddered, despite an attempt to control himself. "I guess," he said, "I'll call it a day."

"You were working in the social hall of the ship, were you not?" demanded Thorne abruptly.

"Yes, sir," replied Bennett.

"I'm going down," said Thorne, after a moment's thought.

When Thorne had been lowered down and had worked his way to the deck, he heard Bennett's voice coming over the telephone:

"I shut the social-hall door after me, sir, and because I was scared and in a hurry I may have jammed it. You may have some trouble, sir."

Thorne opened it sufficiently to permit his squeezing through, and then it refused to slide back another inch. With the slow movement which is necessarily that of a diver, he entered the compartment that not many weeks before had reechoed to the happy voices of men and women. His weighted feet paused a moment on the sodden carpet upon which little children had once romped, while the rays from his powerful electric lamp slowly swept the interior. As he stood there, a strange feeling gripped him. He tried to shake it off; then came the voice of Bennett from the living world above:

"Did you make it, Mr. Thorne?"

"I managed to squirm through," he replied. He was about to add something more when his blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Thorne had been an adventurer, had faced death in many ways and in many lands. He had never known fear, but——

Something had touched him on the shoulder!

As he stood, uncertain, that something made itself felt about his neck, as if two arms were slipping over his shoulders from behind. Whatever it was, it was gentle, as if some friendly diver had stepped up to attract his attention. The touch was almost human, and yet in this watery sepulcher no living thing existed. With a startled cry that Bennett distinctly heard, Thorne turned about and in the white shaft of light stared into the salt-incrusted face of what had once been a human being. His involuntary step away as he had turned had placed him beyond it. Now it floated slowly after him, the body at a forty-five degree angle, the arms outstretched, and it was these arms that had touched him so gently but with sufficient force to be noticed even through his heavy suit. Again he stepped away and with fascinated eyes watched it follow. It was impossible to run with water pressing in at all sides and hampered by the diving-gear, yet Thorne attempted to cross the hall and escape. As if directed by the guiding hand of some supernatural power, the body slowly pursued him, and it was only the man's iron nerve that kept him from going to pieces. He was almost overwhelmed with a desire to scream, and as the outstretched hands and the distorted features once more came into the rays, he fought his way through the smothering, oppressive waters to the door. He cursed aloud as he squirmed through; then, with an effort, he controlled his voice.

"I'm coming up," he said calmly, but he did not deceive Bennett.

HIS eyes swept the landscape the instant the helmet was removed. All about and overhead frowned the same unfriendly mountains and leaden sky; the same sullen waters lapped at the planks of the scow. But all this meant life, and was the most welcome sight he had ever seen.

"That's the acid test for any man's nerve," said Bennett solemnly.

"For a moment I thought I was going mad," said Thorne frankly. "Down there all is death, yet it is like life. I wanted to scream and run—anything to get away from it all. For the first time in my life I fully realized what terror was."

"If a man hasn't been pretty square in this world, a thing like that would drive him mad," said Bennett. "I thought I never would reach that door, and everything I ever did flashed through my mind."

"Yes," said Thorne slowly, as if to himself; "it is the acid test. A man couldn't go through a thing of that sort and not lose his grip if he's been a bad lot—even an iron man like Pennock. It's a terrible ordeal for an innocent man to go through; yet if a man like Penncok had nothing on his mind, he could go through it without any bad effects, because he has iron nerve. But if Pennock had anything to do with the wrecking of the *Aleutian Isle*, his nerve won't do him much good down there. I'm going to take a chance and give him the acid test. I've got just enough time to head him off before he sails for Seattle. If he thinks there's evidence here he can cover up, assuming, of course, that he's guilty, he'll come a-running if it's put up to him right. That's what we've got to do."

"It is easy enough to explain," said Bennett, as the tender headed for town late that afternoon, "but who in thunder is going to think of an explanation under such conditions? A man's only desire is to get back to the land of the living once more."

"That is the way it affected me," returned Thorne. "I suppose your explanation is the same as mine. The social hall is closed in on all sides, and therefore there are no currents in the compartment. When we enter and move about, our bodies create a suction behind, forming a current into which any floating object in the immediate vicinity is drawn. Naturally, as we move ahead, the objects follow."

"That's about it, sir, and I have had similar experiences when working on wrecks, but none just exactly like this," replied the diver, "and is it your theory, Mr. Thorne, that if we can induce Pennock to go below and he is guilty in some way, the experience will break down his nerve?"

"Exactly," said Thorne. "His attitude has convinced me that for a while he feared your work on the wreck would result in disclosures of some sort. Suddenly these fears vanished, and he no longer asked guarded questions about what was taking place. With his magnificent nerve he could withstand any sort of investigation or cross-examination, but with his nerve suddenly gone, he is likely to crack under the strain. A man with less nerve than he could not be induced to go near the wreck. He would be afraid to trust himself. Pennock is a cold-blooded man, and he takes pride in it. Strange as it may seem, if he is innocent, he will doubtless refuse to come down here—and why shouldn't he? But if he is guilty, he'll come without question. Not because we want him to, but so that he can be in a position to take effective measures against anything or anybody that to him may seem dangerous."

"You're a bit cold-blooded yourself when it comes to doping out character," said Bennett, with admiration. "You know, I believe you've hit on the right idea. You don't happen to be the same Thorne who solved several of those propaganda mysteries during the war?"

"Twenty-four hours ago," said Thorne, with a laugh, "you couldn't have induced me to admit that I am other than I pretend to be, but since I have been compelled to take you into my confidence and I have satisfied myself I can rely upon you, I'll admit I did do a little investigating during the war."

Bennett was visibly impressed.

"You don't look like I expected you would," he announced, after a moment's study. "Now, what do you want me to do?"

"Anything," replied Thorne, with a smile, "but act. Be your natural self and you'll get by. Talk when you think you should to appear natural, but if I should interrupt you, just forget what you were about to say. I shall not interrupt you unless you are saying something you shouldn't."

"I get the idea," said Bennett.

THEIR arrival at the hotel during calm weather surprised Pennock, who already had sent his bags to the lobby.

"Just a moment, sir," said Thorne, touching his cap, "but we would like a word with you in private."

"Certainly," replied Pennock, with just a shade of surprise. "You have information of importance?"

"I don't know, sir," laughed Thorne, and it was the attitude of a man who hesitated to annoy a superior with a trivial subject, yet felt that he should.

Pennock led the way to his room.

"Proceed," he said briskly.

"Bennett, here," began Thorne, who knew the whole success of his plan depended upon the plausibility of his story, "was down this morning, sir, and forced his way into the social hall. You'll remember the purser's office window opened onto the social hall, and beside this window was a blackboard. The door of the office which opened out on deck had been jammed. Now, sir, with the picture in mind, you'll readily understand what Bennett found."

"Well, sir," said Bennett, "I found a body half-way through this office window, just as if the poor devil had tried to rush through the door when the ship crashed and, finding it jammed, had tried to crawl through the window and got stuck. I removed the body with considerable difficulty, and for the first time I noticed words had been scratched on the blackboard. They'd been scratched with the sharp point of a knife-blade, and, as it was done in a hurry, I couldn't read most of it, but it was plain it meant something. In the purser's hand I found an open pocket-knife."

"Here's the knife, sir," said Thorne, as he tossed it on the table. It had been found on one of the bodies removed from the wreck several days before.

Pennock regarded it with fascination, then managed to remove his eyes long enough to glance keenly at the others. Thorne was now turning a blue cap round and round in his hand. Bennett's hands were folded and rested upon the table.

"There's been so much talk about the *Aleutian Isle* being wrecked and all that," Bennett went on, "that I thought the words might be important; so I told Mr. Thorne. He went down then."

"I went down, sir," Thorne began, "and made my way into the social hall without difficulty. I found the blackboard just as Bennett said I would, and tried to make out the words. I'm sure whoever wrote them was trying to give information on what caused the wreck. I couldn't make out much, but if we could remove the board and bring it up, it would probably explain a whole lot. We don't want to take any such authority on ourselves, and, as long as you are here, we thought we'd call in a responsible party for service. Either we can bring the board up, though that will take a lot of time and work, or you can go down. Have you ever put on a diver's outfit?"

"Yes," replied Pennock; "several times. You men did the right thing in coming to me. All the bodies have been removed, I suppose?"

"There may be some in the staterooms," replied Bennett, who wanted to glance knowingly at Thorne but repressed the desire. "That I don't know; but this is the social hall, sir."

"I understand."

"We'll be leaving for the wreck to-morrow morning, sir," said Thorne, as the two prepared to leave. "Will that be convenient for you?"

"Quite," replied Pennock. Long after they had gone, he stared blankly at the opposite wall, then, with a sudden shift of the shoulders, as if throwing off a great weight, he laughed a bit nervously and turned in. His nervousness of the evening's reflections would have suggested a guilty conscience had Thorne been present to note the man's manner, but when he turned in, he slept the sound sleep of the righteous.

A DULL, gloomy day greeted them the following morning. It was cold, too, and suggested that it might be stormy before night.

Thorne searched Pennock for signs of a sleepless night, but was disappointed. The man was fresh and feeling fit apparently. Upon arrival at the wreck, he viewed the tips of the *Aleutian Isle's* masts with interest, then announced he was ready to go below at their convenience.

"Very well, sir," replied Thorne; "you may as well get into the togs. You know the design of the social hall, and for that reason it'll be easy for you to find your way about. You'll enter from the starboard side and work your way to port. The light will show you what's immediately ahead, sir. I'll be on the other end of the 'phone. Bennett will be ready to descend in case you need assistance."

"I'll get along," said Pennock, with confidence.

Not until they were about to slip the helmet into position did he show signs of nervousness, and then he quickly controlled himself.

"I'm on deck," he reported sometime later, "and I think the door is just ahead. Yes; there it is."

Thorne, who was now taking care of two sets of 'phones, replied, then turned to the mouthpiece that led to Bennett, who was also below, having followed Pennock down.

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1922.

"All ready, Bennett?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! The instant he's inside, work that door shut, then stand by for orders.

In the next few moments Thorne was almost rigid with tenseness of expectancy. Having been down himself, he could visualize Pennock's movements—the timidity of the inexperienced man as he carefully considered each movement before making it. He could almost see the white shaft of light searching about the compartment, yet always returning to the black bulletin-board that lay almost the ship's breadth away.

Pennock kept up a continual chatter about the progress he was making.

"I'm about half-way across," he said; then there was a pause followed by an exclamation. "Say!" he called. "Any chance of my air-line fouling? I felt something tug or bump me just now."

"Better turn the light back of you and take a look," advised Thorne; "don't take a chance."

The scream that came over the line an instant later chilled Thorne to the very marrow. The agony and terror in the cry beat upon his ear-drums as if to crash through to his very brain. "O my God, what is that?" The voice was that of a man who could barely speak from fright. "Help! Help! Help! Merciful heavens, help!"

Another pause, during which Thorne knew the man was bringing every ounce of his great will-power to bear to hold himself together lest he go mad.

"Great heavens, Thorne, speak to me! Speak, man! For God's sake, say something. Let me know there's a world above with the living, breathing humans in it. Speak—speak!"

And Thorne remained silent.

"Where are you, Thorne? Why don't you speak? Ah, there's the door! Who closed the door?" And then over the wire came the panting breath of the man as he struggled to open the door. An hysterical sob escaped him—a sob that told plainer than words that he was beaten, and then came the blood-curdling scream again. "The thing! The thing—is on me! The arms! The face, staring into the light, coming toward me! What's holding me? I can't move! I'm helpless! I'm—God, I touched it! I——"

And then he cursed as Thorne had never heard a human curse before. It was the pitiful outburst of a mind hovering upon the borders of madness. And lest he be too late, Thorne spoke. His voice was low, commanding, as if, by its very vibrations, to strike a responsive chord in the human below and thus stay his fleeing reason.

"Get a grip on yourself, man! We'll get you out of it all right, but first you must tell us why you wrecked the *Aleutian Isle*. Why?"

"You lie, damn you!" Pennock snarled, "You——"

"In the presence of one of your victims that floats ever closer to you, do you dare tell me I lie, Pennock?"

A queer, gurgling sound came, and then silence. A full minute ticked by, during which nothing came over the wire but a weird gasping, then faintly:

"Yes, Thorne; you're right. I did it. I wanted the insurance money."

"Sent a ship-load of human beings crashing onto a reef in a dark night for a few dirty dollars?" charged Thorne harshly. "How?"

"I thought they'd be saved—before God I thought every one would be saved! I planted a magnet in the wheel-house to make the compass vary a few points. Oh, what have I been saying, Thorne? I— It's a lie! A scheme to ruin me! You got me down here you, you, you—hell-hound to— Oh, man alive, help me! It's coming again, so slowly, yet it moves when I move and stops when I stop. Is there no escape? Open that door!" Again came the screams of terror, continuing frantically despite the sharp words that came from Thorne. He wanted to feel sorry for the poor devil, but could not do so when he thought of his crimes. At length the screaming changed into a series of gasps and—finally—silence.

"Bennett, you'd better open that door now and tell me what you see. He's confessed," said Thorne, after waiting for Pennock to speak again.

"He's collapsed, I guess," announced Bennett. "It's a weird sight, sir. The body is hovering over him, with its arms reaching out. Just a minute!" A sigh came over the wire. "Now I'll go in and get him."

They removed the helmet and suit from Bennett while Thorne and the others were working on Pennock. Stripped of the diving-dress, the man presented an astounding appearance. He stood on the scow, swaying slightly in the breeze. His hair which had been jet-black an hour before was now spotted with white. The eyes stared wildly. There was still evidence of a slight froth about the cruel lips.

AT LAST he spoke, the words coming mechanically and seemingly without effort or direction on his part.

"I'll fool them," he babbled. "They took me into their confidence and told me of the evidence on the board, the only evidence. Ha! Ha! Ha! I'll go below and destroy it, and the world will never know!" He laughed a dry, mirthless cackle that caused the men to glance uneasily at one another.

The man was insane!

His eyes swept those about him, then stopped upon the water, blue-black and roughened by the icy breeze. He stared as if at something the others could not see.

"Ah!" he crooned. "You are reaching for me once more! You want me. You want me to come, but I shall not! I— Ah, but I must! I see—you are Vengeance, and you have come to make me repay. Repay! Repay!" The last came out with a scream. The dilated eyes never left the spot.

"Quick!" shouted Thorne, as he leaped for Pennock. He was a moment too late. A wild, inhuman cry burst from the man as he cleared the scow. He struck the water in the exact spot that his eyes had gazed so searchingly upon and had seen things denied the others.

He vanished beneath the waves as Thorne plunged after him.

Bennett helped the exhausted Thorne onto the scow several minutes later.

"Never got a glimpse of him," he panted. "Perhaps it's just as well he should find a grave among his victims."

"I caught sight of his white face below the surface as you leaped in, sir," replied Bennett. "Then he vanished as if some unseen hand had reached forth and pulled him under. I never saw him again after that, sir, not even a bubble."

Silver Giant

There's Entertainment and Information Here—Things You Probably Don't Know About Seals, Particularly This Seal, Which, Even Among the Eccentric Wild Folk of the Sea, Was an Acknowledged Character

By F. St. Mars

OVER the wine-red moors you can walk to it—to the place where natural lawns of grass begin—and over the edge you can go, almost before you know it, into oblivion. Sometimes the drop is two hundred feet, and sometimes nearer a thousand, but it doesn't make any difference; you will get to the foam-wreathed sea and the broken rocks at the bottom just the same. And the sea-birds will laugh at you from the dizzy black cliff-ledges as you go down.

That seemed to be the only four-footed way into the cove, for the tide-race defied any boat; but the seals had defied the tide-race and lay about asleep upon the newly submerged rocks in every impossible and possible position save the book-pose—all save one cranium.

He looked long seaward, and the mild, intelligent beauty that lived in his wonderful eyes transformed him. He threw back his head, and the "stream-line," smooth, rippling grace of the sea beautified him.

So steadily and fixedly did the beast stare that a watcher, had there been one, would have felt impelled to follow the beast's gaze, and to have seen, as he saw, the commotion in the water heading toward shore right in the center of the walled cove in which the seals lay. It was not so much a question that the water boiled in that one spot—it did so here, there, and everywhere above submerged rocks. It was a question that the boil moved swiftly, was, in fact, heading right into the cove.

Then a head creamed up above the surface—an oddly rounded, neckless head, smooth as a polished pebble, and with little eyes like the eyes of a pig. When a back fin followed, one might have said it was a fish. When a tail—nearly four feet behind the snout—lashed the surface, with flukes set on laterally instead of vertically, one knew it for no fish that ever swam, but a beast—in fact, a porpoise.

And suddenly, frenziedly, it leaped, shaking madly, flinging from side to side a black thing, thick as your wrist, that hung fixed from its throat. It might have been a rope—that black band—if it had not writhed horribly. It might have been giant seaweed if there had not flared blood on the porpoise's throat. In cold fact—quite cold enough at that time of year in those latitudes—it was a five-foot conger-eel, and—I can give you my word—the beast who assaults such a one and fails to kill *instantly* at the first spring gets what is coming to him sure enough.

Congers hunt by scent. They are no fliers. But where they take hold they stay till—well, till either they die or the seat comes out of the other fellow's trousers, so to speak. Also—and this is not the least horrible part about them—they squirm an unbelievable, powerful, icy, slimy, tangling and entangling squirm that turns one's blood cold.

Never, surely, was head shaken as that porpoise shook his rounded cranium; but in the glimpse vouchsafed before he cleaved the surface again and vanished, it seemed certain that if anything was shaken off it would be the porpoise's head and not the conger.

Four minutes seven and one-quarter seconds followed, and then the sea was turned to a caldron again—in another place, and nearer in. This time it was evident, as he leaped clean and sheer, that the porpoise had reached that stage of desperation where madness may begin.

The conger had apparently reached no stage of anything; he apparently had no feelings beyond locking his jaws home and wrapping and unwrapping himself into knots. He did not look sweet, and things appeared bad for the porpoise, and——

There was a little quiet, sort of lazy, sort of gurgling sound somewhere, followed by the suck and drive as of an air-pump, and Silver Giant came up. He had been down exactly twelve minutes one second to the tick, and now he had reappeared to "bring up." Before that, he had been down precisely fourteen minutes one second, and ten minutes thirty-eight seconds previously. And he had been doing the same thing for an hour or so. These little details are of no consequence, of course, only in that they show he was no ordinary beast, no ordinary beast at all, and that he did things in his own lavish way, which was nobody else's. Even in the sea, which produces some eccentric wild folk, he was acknowledged a "character," as we term it.

At a distance, it must be admitted, Silver Giant might easily have been mistaken for a floating buoy. He had that appearance and rotundity. He bobbed majestically up and staidly down on the great breathing swells of the Western Ocean in a vertical position like a buoy, and his was a portly rotundity of *embonpoint*, like a buoy, too.

He was huge. He was apparently naked. He was certainly obese, blubbery and blotched, like unto a jaguar.

His great bluff, bristly nose was stuck straight upward to the sky. His eyes were shut tight—at least the skin was round them, for I never could make out if he owned eyelids or not. Moreover, the trio of bristles that did duty as eyebrows pointed skyward, too. He was asleep. Peradventure he dreamed. Nevertheless, he blew the water away from his nostrils. They would have taken a wine-cork apiece nicely—after the fashion of a young whale.

Then the hot-blooded, maddened porpoise and the cold-blooded, apparently perfectly calm conger lashed into his immediate vicinity, creaming the oily swell to foam, seething in bubbles, and Silver Giant woke up abruptly.

It was apparent at once, by his eyes, that he must be of the seal people. In spite of his mighty swollen form, of his bloated appearance, his ferocious mien, none surely but a seal would own eyes like that, so large, so brown, intelligent and soft. And that was true. For Silver Giant was a full-grown male great gray seal—king of all the seals, and a name to conjure with. No man lived who could measure or weigh him alive, and he gave none the chance to do so dead; but if nine feet in length and a quarter of a ton in weight convey anything, we will let it stand at that.

SILVER GIANT eyed the maelstrom that possessed the porpoise and conger for its immediate vortex with that benevolent expression characteristic of nearly all the seals. Ladies have called it a "kind look."

Then he opened his jaws and was no longer mild; and "kind" then would have represented his last description. If one could picture a mammoth dog of antediluvian proportions, its jaws might conceivably have been like that. Also, the brute's eyes turned bloodshot.

Promptly, something or something else happened. It seemed, truly, that Silver Giant had done no more than roll in the trough as a floating hogshead might, that he had given one flail-like stroke with his hind flippers—all claws present and correct, by the way—but the result—ho, the result!

Very few torpedoes cut the waves more swiftly than did Silver Giant in that instant. One second he was one portly, floating body, the next he was a boiling, bubbling, gurgling wake.

Then all sank out of sight together, and the mighty, unmindful rollers swept on, lifting the foam that was left to loop and spread and fade, like smoke.

But anon returned Silver Giant, coming up much in the same place where he went down. Also the conger—clasped tightly in Silver Giant's heavily clawed front flippers, and not overjoyed at all.

The famous conger bulldog grip that had worked with the porpoise, and might conceivably embarrass a small common seal, was of no avail here. To find a stranglehold upon that great blubbing mass was a herculean task indeed. In fact, Silver Giant seemed insensible to pain, and removing the conger from his neck as one would remove a necktie, first slew, then skinned the thing, starting round the base of the head and working backward. If you have ever accomplished that same feat, you will appreciate the great seal's adroitness.

Seeing that most seals regard conger as perhaps their greatest *bon bouche*, it seemed strange that Silver Giant did not immediately dine off his capture; but executing that ponderous roll of his that, more than anything, suggested his great bulk, he dived headlong into the depths, caught in swift succession two large pollack, dived again and, so far as that vast ampitheater was concerned, with its soft-eyed watching common seals, its sweeping, inrushing herring-gulls, and its military rows of white-skirted guillemots, he was no more.

You behold him fading out downward into the green fog-haze of the sea—an immense, glaireous, pear-shaped bubble, semi-luminous, changing from a bubble to a wraith and from a wraith to—nothing.

THEN occurred a miracle. At least, it hardly seemed explainable otherwise. Silver Giant changed—changed completely, I say, from great bulging lips to mighty hind flippers—a dozen yards or more to shore, by the way. He became green—faint, uncertain, shadowy, dappled, almost luminous green, green all over; and his outline and his bulk together dissolved into the green world of the sea all round, so that he appeared merely as a ghost of a thing, a possible something, an intangible spirit shape, uncanny and indefinite. Only if you looked at him from above the surface—not below—could you make him out at all, and then but very faintly, as a figure appears through fog.

But Silver Gaint was soon too deep down, however, to be seen from above the surface at all, and he was going like the wind, too.

Apparently he had work to do—work of importance, for the execution of which he was under a time-limit. For which reason, perhaps, he did not argue with any or tarry by the way. Not even when a fin-whale, all smooth, and undulating along in immense waves, took the light from him and forced him to sweep aside did he say anything. Not, either, when a shoal of small sharks appeared from nowhere in particular, and intangible as spirits—but surely it was the blood of the conger that called him—did the seal do more than swerve mightily, canting clean over, and grandly with the force of it, so that his leopard-belly flashed for a moment in a sheet of pure silver against the surface-light.

Then the deep darkened, and a shadow grew up in front first, and overhead next, and the shadow became rock, walled in, black, overarched, weed-draped and terrible. And Silver Giant, swung left-handed, or left-flippered, rather, swept along the slope of it. He was now, in point of fact, swimming along the base of the rocky island.

Very strange was it down there in the black-green gloom, strange and cold and still. No sound broke the spell except a deep, recurring, muffled thunder from nowhere special, which was in itself even more terrifying than the awful elemental silence, which, indeed, it really served to emphasize.

Silver Giant seemed to be all alone down here—he had been down over five minutes already, with his nostrils shut, like closed port-holes—but this was only illusion. He had plenty of company, really. Silver sparks, jets of silver-white light and constellations as of shooting-stars from time to time ahead of him proved it. They were fish making haste to "give him the road" as he tore along on his wonderful way.

Apparently, the colossal seal had a reputation, but not for gentleness. And when a common seal—ghost, I mean—not less than the length of a tall man removed from out his course with that disconcerting velocity peculiar to seals, one felt sure of it. Not even the beaky, blubbery dolphin, who could not have measured an inch under seven feet, and which was tearing some luckless shell-fish or other from the undergrowth of seaweed, found any reason to float or swim in the seal's path one second longer than was absolutely necessary.

Then, all at once, a peculiar thing happened: the gloom of the towering cliff remained, but not the cliff. It had gone, and Silver Giant moved inward and swam now harder than ever, going deeper and deeper, while the dark grew darker and fearfully darker, and the muffled thunder that had all along been growing weirdly could now literally be felt in its vibrations.

The surface was dark now. The sea was

dark. Only the stifled explosions remained.

Silver Giant shot—there is no other word for it—his truly immense bristling bunch of long, sweeping whiskers forward till they projected almost straight out in front of him. His funny eyebrows, too. His immense cushioned upper lips, previously mentioned, had suggested that here, in these grandiose whiskers, was concentrated a power of supersensitiveness beyond our conception, even. His actions now proved it, for, in that Stygian dark, swimming, as he was now, at top speed, these same whiskers appeared to be his sole "sight," if one may so put it, his only guarantee against smashing collision.

Even granting all these things, however, it is not easily apparent how Silver Giant got to know when he had, so to speak, arrived. Just when the seventeenth second had been added to the thirteenth minute of his total immersion without taking in air, he flung up. Also, he backed water. He "banked." He became once more the buoy, the monstrous, bottlelike father of all bottle-imps—for, once under water, his appearance was always strangely uncanny—and, like a bottle, too, he floated vertically, rapidly upward to the surface, which he broke with the same soft, sucking gurgle and drive, as of a force-pump, he had before. Time, fourteen minutes seventeen seconds and one quarter from dive to reappearance. Not bad—was it?—for a mere beastie—a mammal with warm blood and his heart in the proper place and all the rest of it, like ourselves, and with no fishy gills or displaced heart or any other cold-blooded adaptions to help him, as the fish had.

THOSE who go to far lands to behold nature in her grander moods might have stayed at home and seen this thing as Silver Giant saw it. I cannot do it for them, because neither pen nor brush could paint it. All I know is that there was a cavern whose walls, painted with all the colors of sunset—they were some minute organism, really, but Fact is a horrid little imp—ran up far to a vaulted roof whose spikes and stalactites hung down like a forest of glittering, mighty chandeliers; that the cavern was filled with sea, pure-emerald hue and clear as crystal, rising and falling like the sobbing breast of some elemental female incarnation in trouble; that the walls of the cavern and its floor of gigantic white boulders could be seen as plainly below as above the surface, so that all above seemed duplicated below and vice versa, as if the surface were some huge mirror; that the water ran moaning and sucking and reverberating far down black, dark tunnels, losing itself at last, with reports like cannon, who could tell in what terrible depths of the earth's very bowels, and that upon almost every pedestal and shelf, cornice and ledge of painted rock above water there sat, as they were very gargoyles cut out of it, uncouth, reptilian-looking black cormorants and shags, whose gape, when they opened them to croak and bellow one to the other with hollow and lugubrious sepulchral echoings, were pure gamboge. It was as though one had penetrated to grim nature's very secret resting-place, and that these, these fantastic beasts and birds—for there was another enormous great gray seal hauled out upon a ledge—were her guards from out the ages, challenging all who dared approach and barring further passage.

When Silver Giant had sufficiently examined the marvelous picture—not for art's but for safety's sake—he swam slowly to the other great gray seal upon the ledge, and solemnly, holding the conger in his fore flippers, bobbed before her. It was as if a sea-god were to make a peace-offering to his goddess; but it only made us laugh. The great beast, his head all smooth and shining, his whiskers all drooped, looked so absurdly bashful, awkward and droll.

It had no effect upon the goddess, however. She slept; at least, the skin round her eyes was tightly closed, though her rest was so punctuated with tremors and fidgetings, heavings and wriggles that it seemed doubtful if her sleep could be very deep.

I have used the word "her" here already for reasons. The goddess appeared to differ from Silver Giant totally, not only in color—she was fawny gray and blotched somewhat, though not so smartly as he—but in the fact that she appeared well furred, and he unashamedly naked. Moreover, her size seemed not a great deal less than his—a thing not usual in seal society, perhaps.

Apparently Silver Giant had learned the patience of all those who go down to the sea to earn their daily bread, for he remained before that female seal in an upright position, holding the very much defunct conger between his fore flippers, for exactly ten minutes without, so far as one could see, moving an inch; though how he contrived to "keep station" with the currents running like a tide-slip all backward and forward is one of those many things I confess I cannot explain.

Finally the great seal clambered up out of the water upon the rock and was still. Still he lay, indeed, for so long that he dried, and—behold!—he was no longer a vast naked thing, but a furry giant, fearfully obese, garbed in a coat of pure silver. If, however, he had seemed to be asleep, he was not really so, for at length, with his strangely screwing, wriggling motion—so different from the gait of sea-lions—he approached the female seal. He put down his conger. He tickled the other seal in the ribs with his fore flipper.

But that was not enough. She only wriggled and flung back a protesting flipper as she lay upon her side. She did not wake up.

Silver Giant waved his big smooth head in that inimitable way of all seals and tickled her again, gently but firmly.

She wriggled pettishly and turned clean over, but she did not wake up. Again the giant tickled the lady, and she once more waved a protesting flipper in the air; then he scratched her.

The answer was a harsh roar and a set of magnified dog's fangs that assuredly have no duplicate outside the species in Europe. The goddess woke up this time in very vengeance, and the suddenness with which her quaint, gentle, landlike ways, if I may so put it, had changed to the appalling cold ferocity of the sea was startling.

Silver Giant made no attempt to meet, but waved his head out of reach of her slashing onslaught. He picked up the conger and put it down again. Obviously he was offering it to her, in spite of the fact that the merest graze her fangs had given him had already drawn a bead of purest scarlet on his big muscular neck.

The female seal eyed the fish and, with one rippling motion of her neck, bolted it whole!

A pause followed the action, and, as chance would have it, a pause coincided among the waves, so that, for as long as a man might take to draw a deep breath, there was a waiting, dripping silence throughout the cavern and its adjacent tunnels. And in the silence all could plainly hear the low chuckle.

The heads of both seals snicked round together as if jerked by a single lever. Their big doglike eyes stared for a moment, their huge bodies rigid as if carved smooth and water-worn out of the very rock. Then down went the head of the female and up went the head of Silver Giant as he ripped out a harsh and rasping roar—a roar peculiarly instinct with the remorseless cruelty of the sea.

WHAT are we to say of Athon, fisherman of the Isles? Would you have him painted, look to the portrait of a viking of old. Would you have his character, read of the sagas of the Norsemen.

Bearded, lean, sinewy, in faced blue blouse, Athon of the Isles stood up, ax in hand, between Silver Giant and *his* sea—"his sea that his being fulfilled."

Athon must have lain there for hours, motionless, wet, cold, cramped, behind some niche or other, must have made a close study of the daily program of the seals—they have a daily program, by the way, and a strict one—for weeks. He would kill. His hatchet and club said so; his light-blue eyes said so still more. Hidden in some black tunnel, out of which he must have crawled, his boat, manned by his three sturdy sons and a nephew, rose perilously up and down. He would kill—and for what? For blubber, my friends, and for oil—not for sealskin. No, madam; no true seal bears the sealskin coat that covers your beautiful back or the muff that warms your dainty hands. That precise unfortunate belongs to another and very different order of beasts. Also, Athon had a jealousy. They were both fishermen—the beast so much more perfect at the craft than the man.

But Athon had made one mistake. Perhaps a deliberate one; if so, he was some man. He stood between Silver Giant and his sea, and he who dares that dares anything. 'Twere cheaper to hold your hand up to an approaching avalanche, almost, or defy a motor-bus than cut Silver Giant off from his own realm.

And like an avalanche, verily, Silver Giant accepted the challenge. He came—oh, yes; roaring till the echoes and the cormorants and the clouds of rock-pigeons thundered madly together, tremendous, ferocious beyond the fury of any mere land animal, and with startling speed this king of all the seals charged. And I can give you my word that it takes something super in the shape of *genus homo* to stand up to the desperate rush of a quarter-ton, nine-foot great gray seal and not quail.

Although no sun had ever painted more flaming colors on wall and balcony, a filtered light came through from outside. Also the torches in the now madly propelled boat flickered from round a corner. Enough light, that is, to swear by; enough to see the half-moon gleam of Athon's whirling ax. Enough to behold the man go down under the colossal, hurtling, reeking, roaring, ravening mass of blubber, brawn and fury. Enough, too, to view the mountain of foam from the headlong plunge that followed.

Behind Silver Giant came Silver Giantess. She did not fight. It was not her shearing jaws that closed on the ax. No need. They have a path of ease who tread where Silver Giant has bashed a way.

Beneath the infinitely clear green surface an immense silver streak showed for one brief second, drawn down that precise tunnel that led from the cavern to the—no, not merely the sea, sirs, but the Western Ocean. Behind it followed another. Men saw it as they hauled what was left of a crumpled Athon into the leaping boat. Saw they, too, the rampant crimson stain streaking after—saw, I say, but little guessed what followed.

The young adult male great gray seal, playfully diving for cuttlefish—was it?—and chasing the luckless salmon in wild circles—slaying again and again—as one chases mice, a cable's length or so off the mouth of the cavern, was one of the most astonished seals in the world when he beheld Silver Giant belch from that tunnel and go rasping, roaring, raging by him. But one of the most delighted seals in the world was he to view Silver Giantess less speedily following.

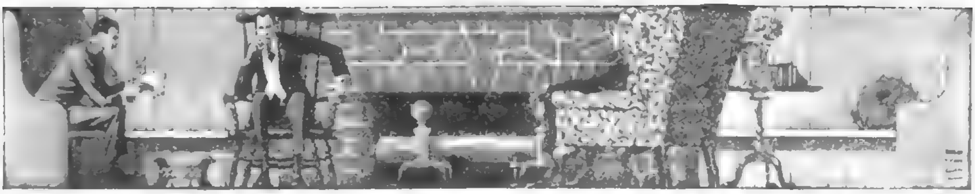
Perhaps he made a miscalculation, that young leviathan; and they tell me you must never make a miscalculation in love, and I know you should not in war. Anyway, this was done. Perhaps the beast judged by the red, red wake of Silver Giant that he had had all he wanted of war, for a bit, at any rate, and would not come back and ask for more. If so, he insulted Silver Giant and underestimated his race. Seals can take some perfectly awful wounds sometimes, that would knock a land beast silly, and never turn a hair, so to speak. Possibly, in this case, the pneumatic diving-kit of blubber explains much. Anyhow, the ax was sharp; Athon's arm was strong, and the wound on Silver Giant's vasty shoulder had bitten deep, but Silver Giant came back and asked for more!

The young—but adult, remember—great gray seal realized the wondrous truth when, five minutes later, wreathing wonderful invisible figures round and above and about and below Silver Giantess, times on his back, times on his keel, or one or other beam, a perfectly appalling, living, raging, roaring, rushing, rending, ravening red mass descended upon him from out the green.

BUT who can describe that battle of the giants? The deep that boiled, the foam that flew, the "naked" mighty shapes that writhed and dived locked together, the vortex that bored on the dive, the spume and blood and oil that swirled after. The strange submarine roarings, audible on the surface—I swear it—the glimpse of curved bodies rending and clawing—quite useful claws, too—on end. The snap-shot of Silver Giant hanging to his foe's throat as the ferret hangs to the rat, and that foe carving his sides with diabolical thoroughness and, last, the long, long sickening dive that seemed as if it never would end, as end it did at long last—over a quarter of an hour, I feel sure—just when it seemed as if both beasts must have been drowned out of hand, in the young but adult male great gray seal, executing "ducks and drakes"—the seal's top-notch means of progression—away in the offing, flying for his life before a great red head, grimly, grisly and terrible, that cut the surface like the stern of a destroyer, with a little wedge of foam in his wake.

And then? Oh, well, and then Silver Giant returned on the "round-barreled swell, before storm, gray, foamless, enormous and growing," and loafed off to a fish supper with his new-won—and well-won—bride. But here we "step down," for it was with the seal as it has been written of certain men:

He does not desire as ye desire,
Nor devise as ye devise.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

EVERYBODY'S editor recently suggested in this department that fiction could be educational as well as entertaining. In connection with this, a Chimney Corner contributor says:

> The story "Shagan," by James Oppenheim, in December EVERYBODY'S, takes the reader into the dark, tragic atmosphere of a prison death-cell. It shows one the terribly pathetic side of capital punishment. It gives insight into a little understood subject. It moves one no less than a vital sermon. It is educational. I would enjoy telling the author that he drove home a much needed lesson in my case.

Further testimony comes from H. C. Collingwood, Assistant Extension Professor of Forestry at Cornell University.

> I wish to compliment you upon that most excellent serial, "Foraker's Folly," by Harold Titus. In the January instalment there is one of the most excellent arguments for forestry that I have ever read. I have recommended this story to a number of people who are interested in such things, for I feel that the principle of forestry and the vision of a forester have been displayed in a most remarkable manner.

THE controversy started by the two gentlemen who offered to buy flowers or to contribute to a pension fund for Gridley Adams provided "Prose and Worse" was discontinued is on again.

> Every time we have to refer to this matter we feel as Stewart Edward White says he feels when he is called upon to speak, which is like one of two little boys who went to a circus. Arrived at the tent, they found the fifty cents they had between them would admit only one. They matched pennies, and the boy who won entered. The other found what he thought was a secluded place and knelt down to look under the canvas. A canvas-man who happened along took full advantage of the situation, and the lad suddenly found himself within the "big top." The other boy greeted him with, "Well, how'd you get in?" "Oh, I was asked in," was the reply.

But here's what a lady has to say to the two gentlemen enemies of "Prose and Worse":

> The two gentlemen who would have Mr. Gridley Adams' "Prose and Worse" discontinued need the flowers—I won't even vote pensions for them. When a man can't laugh, he's sick—very sick. But when he won't laugh, he's *dead*. So let old General Grouch and General Nuisance not turn to G. A.'s page.

And this from a man:

> Don't "Stop the Press" on "Prose and Worse." I always get a few good laughs out of it. I think it finishes up the magazine in fine style.

Another man:

> I do not want to miss an issue of EVERYBODY'S as the reading is great, more so "Prose and Worse," by Adams.

ALAN SULLIVAN, whose story "Spirit of the Beast," first of a trilogy, appears in May, thinks (and we're sure he is right) that the Chimney Corner circle will be interested in a few observations on the differences between the magazine-reading public in England and the United States.

> Over here [he says, writing from England] the average man wants unadulterated fiction and nothing else. He is not much attracted to the romance or drama of business when served up in fictional guise. He leaves business, with all its garnishings, at his office. He finds little incentive in tales of effort or commercial rivalry, and asks principally to be lifted clear away from an atmosphere which is too suggestive of work. In contrast, the modern American puts up no imaginary fences, finds his life's drama in his business, and welcomes any well-written fictional excursion from which he can draw fresh ideas and inspiration. British readers are not in love with anything subtle in the way of magazine stories. They want the job finished,

tied up and labeled, so that there may be no mistake about it. The Britisher shrugs his shoulders at any printed display of passion, and by "passion" I mean those profound revulsions of feeling which are, after all, the strongest motives in life. It is possible that the "Americanism" of some American publications is overdone, but at any rate they do express the strivings and aspirations of a young and intensely ambitious people.

J. D. GORMAN, of Gallup, New Mexico, wrote us a letter some time ago that made us want to do exactly what a certain Englishman did on a certain occasion while hunting in Africa.

The Englishman and a companion were beating up a ravine to see what they could find. Suddenly they heard a mighty growl. The Englishman stopped, sputtered "Beg pardon," and fled.

That's the way we felt when we read that letter. But Mr. Gorman is one of those refreshing persons who joyfully changes his mind when there's a reason. Read:

A year ago I wrote saying I did not think your magazine as good as it should be. I wish to say now that there has been a wonderful improvement in it, according to my way of thinking, and I think I know what kind of stories men, at least, like. It is easier to find something to kick about than to give credit when credit is due, and I like to be at least fair and let you know that I like the magazine better than any magazine published, and venture to say that if your circulation has not already increased wonderfully, it will do so in a short time if you keep up your stroke. "Godless Valley" is fairly good so far; "The Mystery of Ravensdene Court" is fine, and "Foraker's Folly" is also fine. "The Phantom Auto" is good, and "Stop the Press" is a rip-snorter.

"STOP THE PRESS," to which Mr. Gorman refers, was written by Oliver Peck Newman, newspaper man as well as author, who says he told in that story just how he thinks a newspaper should be run. And he adds: "I know it is possible."

I live in Washington [Mr. Newman says], the only town I was ever in which I consider fit for human habitation. Due, I presume, to the calm temper of my maternal Quaker ancestry, the various and sundry ups and downs of my forty-four years of life seem to have left few marks of age, for my fat, bald and gray friends of boyhood seem to me like old men, and resent the fact that when I am with them I am usually mistaken for a son or a nephew of one or the other. All my life I've had an itching foot, and have moved on to the next place as soon as I began to notice the same faces on the street every day.

MR. NEWMAN started out to be a soldier.

I went to West Point in 1897, but before my first year was over I succumbed to mathematics—that hoodoo which has nipped many promising young military careers in the bud. The summer of 1898 marked the beginning of my "literary" career. I wrote a story of cadet life at West Point and sold it for sixteen dollars. The next step in my literary career was to get a job as a reporter on a newspaper.

PRESIDENT WILSON appointed Mr. Newman head of the city government of Washington.

There I experienced the difference between being on the outside looking in and the inside looking out. In 1917 I enlisted in the first officers' training-camp at Fort Myer, Virginia. I was assigned to the Eightieth Division, sailed in May, 1918, got home in April, 1919, and have been on my way back to my literary career ever since. My hobby is honest journalism, which, strange as you may consider it, I believe is also entirely practical.

WE'RE introducing to the Chimney Corner John R. Shattuck, of Brooklyn. He comes to us via the New York *Times*, in which he said:

In EVERYBODY'S for December I read a story entitled "The Buddha Pearl," which had chiefly to do with the success of a murderer who wore gloves to hide his finger-prints. Will we have to censor our fiction as well as our movies in order to discourage crime?

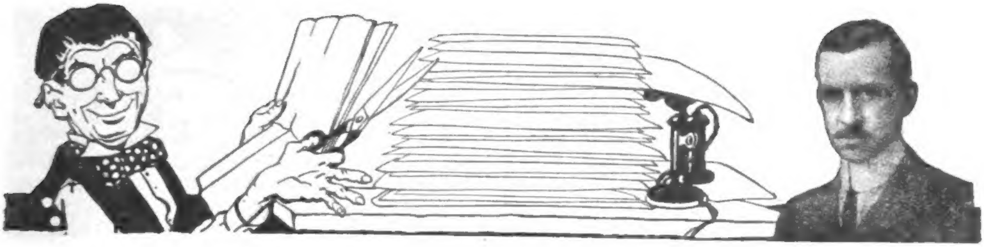
And now Mr. McCloy, author of the story, has the floor.

John R. Shattuck's criticism of "The Buddha Pearl" seems to mark him as a captious person who can find lawlessness in any sort of fiction. I presume he would object to Stevenson's description of Long John Silver on the ground that it would incite boys to become pirates and lose their legs. Mr. Shattuck should confine his reading to the *Congressional Record*—or the new tariff bill. There alone can a man find fiction without any untoward suggestion

SUPPORTED by the following communication, EVERYBODY'S editor feels absolutely safe in recommending EVERYBODY'S to married women.

My husband works hard all day, and each evening he likes to lie down and rest while I read him a story. Formerly it was not infrequent that he would drop asleep while I was reading. Now, however, since reading your new EVERYBODY'S, he never falls asleep, as the stories are so full of action and never lag.

SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

On program of Pittsburgh church: "*All Through the Night. Bar. Solo.*" (L. M. H.)

On movie billboard: "*The Fireman's Bride with Neal Burns.*"

On a vacant house: "*Filling Wanted.*"

On business-card of Harold Hotel, Aberdeen, S. D.: "*Clean Beds. Barn in connection.*" (A good chance to hit the hay.)

Sign on exhibit in Chicago Natural History Museum: "*The group is represented near Glencoe, Ill., overlooking the golph grounds*"

In Baltimore: "*Swindell Brothers.*"

In Ohio: "*Robert Robb, Prop. of Crooksville Garage*"

In Lisbon, O.: "*Bye & Bye. Merchants.*"

At Manitowoc, Wis.: "*A. Wit, Harness & Saddle Dealer.*"

At Paducah, Ky.: "*Toof & Toof.*" (Not dentists but brokers.)

At Fort Wayne, Ind.: "*W. F. Pie, 826 Cherry Street.*"

Married at Madison, Wis.: "*Miss Mae Argue and Jacob Bable.*"

(Elizabeth, N. J., Journal)

WANTED—Salesmen accustomed to making big money; experience necessary, but not essential. (MRS. J. E. S.)

Boy, get Noah Webster on the 'phone, quick!

(In Everybody's for December)

Some of the nails employed to fasten up the packing-case were still lying about on the floor. (J. D.)

Oh, yes; we all do it.

(Lexington, Ky., Herald)

Young man wanted as milk-driver; must be neat and clean and a good mixer. BROWN HILLS DAIRY. (I. A. M.)

Yes; but who has to furnish the water?

(New Orleans Item)

MY DEAR MISS LEES: Will you please tell me if it is polite to eat with my rat on. A READER.

Gnaw.

(Marinette, Wis., Eagle-Star)

BOY SHOT IN GARDEN PATCH.

Get Mrs. Wiggs on the Long Distance.

(Hackettstown, N. J., Gazette)

The men of the M. E. church congregation will hold a frolic next Saturday afternoon at the church for the purpose of putting the graveyard in order. All are invited.

And a rattling good time is promised.

(Chicago Tribune)

Examinations showed three distinct punctures of the stomach wall. Any one should have proved fatal. Mrs. Levy will live. "I don't understand it," Dr. Wiseman said last night. "By all the rules of medical science, that woman shouldn't be alive."

Guess we'll have to kill her, then, 'cause we just can't change the rules.

(Country Gentleman)

The animals, by moving round and brushing each other, are able to keep their bodies warm, but in an open stock-car there is no protection for their lower limbs.

And often their arms get chapped.

(Great Bend, Kan., Tribune)

He leaves two sons, both married, to whom we extend our sympathy.

Why the last six understandingly unnecessary words?

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(Richmond Times-Dispatch)

In his Sarasate selection, "Gypsy Airs," Seidel employed every device of the violinist, each with consummate skill. With remarkable bowing, with splendid legato, spiccato, saltato, pizzato and martellato, he left one astounded and gasping.

Luckily he did not use his potatato, or they might have choked to death.

(Elkader, Ia., Democrat)

Anton Huebsch and Postmaster Lou Cramer, of McGregor, visited our sanctum yesterday while we were out. We hope they will do so again. (H. S. J.)

There's a back-hander for you, all right, all right.

(Colorado Springs Gazette)

New bungalow; never occupied, in Kansas City, Mo.; long loving-room, fireplace, etc., etc. (W. F. W.)

Should appeal to parents of daughters at the stagnant age.

(Delevan, Ill., Times)

Born to Mr. and Mrs. Pancake, of Peoria, Nov. 13th, a daughter.

One good turn deserves another.

(Houghton, Mich., Mining Gazette)

The two charged that the patients were living under astounding conditions of corruption and immortality with discipline lacking. (M. S. C.)

Boy, call William J. Burns on the 'phone.

(Letter received by Rochester concern from salesman in Montana)

Where did I tell you to send my check for this week? Didn't keep a copy of my letter, so don't know where you were to send it, but wherever it was to be sent please send it there p. d. q.; only, how am I to know where it is so I can go there and get it, as I leave this town to-night and don't know where will be next.

(Adv. in Chicago Tribune)

PURE HONEY FROM OUR BEES.

In most store honey the bee is silent, as in comb.

(Earlville Leader)

J. C. Kelley's little dog got in the way of the cars this morning and suffered a painful accident. His head was cut off. (H. S. J.)

Other than that, he wasn't hurt much to speak of.

(Carlisle, Ky., Mercury)

There was quite a number of men on the streets in an intoxicated condition—more than usual, it appeared. There were no "roughnecks" among them, however, and the day passed very peaceably, except for the killing in Henryville.

A dull day in Kentuck.

(Atlanta Constitution)

FREE—All barber work free on rear chairs. 14. East Mitchell.

Boy, take this horsehair rocker 'round and have the edges trimmed a bit.

(Quotation appearing in dissenting opinion by Marshall, J., in Canterbury vs. N. W. M. L. Ins. Co., 124 Wis. 169)

Having taken a step in the wrong direction with the best of resolutions that we will not take another, when to go further, having started, is the natural consequence of the digression, it is most likely to occur, or a return movement be indulged in, or an incongruous position be adopted.

And "that's that!"

(Letter from an island caretaker)

DEAR SIR: Your letter came. Glad you bought a team of horses. Hilda is sick. She has diphtheria, and she will die, I think. Clara died this eve. She had it, too. We are quarantined. Five of Fisher's family have got it. My wife is sick. She hain't got it. If this thing gets worse, we may have to get a doctor. Them trees are budding good.

Everybody satisfied.

(Danville, Va., Press)

Mr. Buckles' new home is an attractive five-room cottage with a basement in the north part of the town.

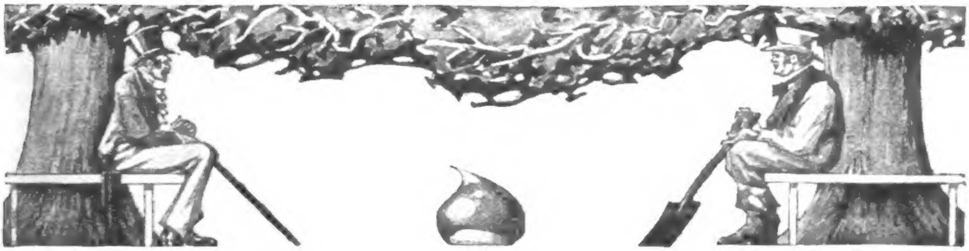
And he probably isn't telling where that basement is, either.

(Piano-player adv. in Blairstown, N. J., Press)

The player is just as essential as clothes—just as sure as you should clothe your body and the bodies of your children with good, durable clothing, so sure you should clothe your and their minds with beautiful music, developing and maturing thoughts that lie dormant, only waiting for the proper leaven to bring them to light.

A mind without musical conception is just as lacking as an oil-painting with the majority of colors left out. If you want your children to have good moral thoughts install in their day-acts good music, and their minds will develop daily like a beautiful flower, casting their radiance and beautiful aroma upon all they meet. (R. M.)

Johnny, go wash your hands before you come to the table.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

OVERHEARD at the card-table in the club-car from Plainfield, New Jersey, to Communipaw:

"Tommy, I'd like to talk to you sometime to-day about that sixty thousand dollars' worth of machinery you are going to put in. We make that sort——"

"Spend sixty thousand dollars—now? Who gave you that yarn?"

"You were at the next table—and talking so loud I couldn't help but hear you——"

"Where?"

"At the club last night."

"What time?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Oh, nine o'clock—at the club—last night. Well, I just had my third shot of Carroll's making. I always spend sixty thousand dollars for machinery after I've had three shots of Jimmy's home brew—but not a dollar the next day."

A RABID baseball "fan" ended an earthly career which, it is sad to relate, had been such that he found himself translated, not within the Pearly Gates but into the kingdom of Lucifer. However, he was somewhat cheered in his misfortune to meet an old friend who had preceded him and who was equally an enthusiast over the national game. This one imparted the information that baseball was among the activities practised in the nether regions, but the ray of hope it brought was quickly extinguished by the words: "But the home team loses every day."

And then he realized the full significance of eternal damnation.

RECENTLY, in one of the public schools on the lower East Side of New York, the children underwent the Binet test. One of them, having been graded as subnormal, was sent to the Institute for the Feeble-minded, but, being considered normal by its directors, was promptly returned.

Her schoolmates, who thought that Minnie had gone permanently, were surprised to see her, and one of them explained,

"Minnie, she went away to get examined to be an idiot, but she didn't pass."

SOME years ago in a Western state, then a territory, a very popular citizen became involved with an influential and overbearing character and killed him.

Public sentiment leaned toward the defendant, but the law was against him, and, when the day of trial came, the defendant, his counsel and friends held a consultation, and, fearful of the consequences, they decided that the defendant should plead guilty and beg the court's mercy.

In due course, a jury was impaneled and the defendant's counsel entered the plea. The jury was so charged by the court and retired. Presently it returned, and the foreman announced,

"We find defendant not guilty."

The judge viewed the jury with a look of curiosity, and said:

"Gentlemen of the jury, how be it? This defendant pleads guilty, and you find him not guilty."

The foreman answered,

"Well, your Honor, the defendant is such a liar we can't believe him under oath."

MR. JONES, a manufacturer who comes of a family which has been rich for generations, had a customer named Smith who had risen to sudden wealth during the war. In the course of a business transaction it seemed expedient for Jones to invite Smith and his wife to pay a social call at his home. On arriving they were received in the drawing-room, which contained some antique furniture of which Mrs. Jones was very proud. Mrs. Smith proceeded to seat herself upon a venerable but very valuable sofa which plainly showed its age, and, as she was a very portly person, it gave way and a leg was broken. She was promptly rescued from the wreck, and, wishing to make light as possible of the mishap, turned to her hostess and remarked,

"It is all right, Mrs. Jones; we had to start poor ourselves."

DENNIS, on a trip to South America, came across a very pretty Spanish parrot, which he bought and shipped to his old friend Maguire as a pleasant surprise. Upon arriving home he called on his friend, and among the first questions he asked was:

"Well, Marty, did ye get th' foine parrot I sent ye?"

"Oi did thot, Dinny, an' Oi want to tell ye that Oi niver put me teeth into a tougher bird in me loife."

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS, who spent last winter in Florida, alternating writing with golf, was arraying himself for the links one day after luncheon while a friend waited outside his room.

The friend was the complete golf "fan"—the kind that talks, thinks, and dreams only of golf and in golfing-terms. Adams, hastening as best he could, heard his rival growling and fuming, and besought his patience.

"I'll be there in two minutes."

"What's the matter with you, anyway?" barked the other. You've been quarter of an hour already."

"I've lost a collar-button," explained Adams, on hands and knees before the bureau.

There was a silence; then from outside came the voice, absent-minded but sharp with impatience:

"Well, drop another and play three, can't you?"

"BUT, my dear madam," protested Chicago lawyer to a fair client, "there is no insurance money for you to draw. Your late husband never insured his life; he had only a policy against fire."

"Precisely," said the widow briskly. "that is the very reason I had him cremated."

AN ENGLISH duchess had been owing her milliner a long time. The money was sorely needed, and after the bill had been repeatedly ignored, the milliner sent her little daughter to make an appeal for settlement.

"Be sure to say 'Your Grace' to the duchess," said the anxious mother, and the child gravely promised to remember.

When, after long waiting, she was ushered into the presence of the great lady, the little girl made a low courtesy, and then, folding her hands and closing her eyes, said softly,

"For what I am about to receive may the Lord make me truly thankful."

The quick-witted duchess flushed as her eyes rested on the wistful child who so unconsciously had rebuked her, and without delay made out a check for the amount due.

THERE'S a good one going around on Mr. Lawrence Perry. When his young hopeful was going back to Lawrenceville School, keen interest was felt in the family as to the youngster's passing a certain exam. He was told to telegraph the result. Lawrence, senior received the following wire: "Yes." Although brevity passes for the soul of wit this extreme paucity was scarcely satisfying

He wired back, "Yes what?"

The answer arrived in due course: "Ye sir."

TWO young society buds were exchangi confidences over the afternoon cups of te

"Tell me, dear," said Adèle, "is it tr that you are going to marry Paul Ange wood?"

"*Marry* Paul?" echoed Doris. "Why, no never! I wouldn't know what to do wi him. He can't play golf, tennis, can't rid can't fly, or even drive his own car."

"But, dearie, you know he can swi beautifully," interposed her friend.

"Hm. You wouldn't want a husband th you had to keep in an aquarium, wo you?"